

LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1064.—VOL. XLII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 22, 1883.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["OH, HAVE PITY ON ME," CRIED LILIAN, "I HAVE NO MOTHER TO LOVE ME."]

NAMELESS.

CHAPTER III.

A HANDSOME house in Eaton-square, furnished with every comfort that wealth could purchase or taste devise, a number of servants assembled in the hall as though to await an expected arrival. It was the very same day on which Lord Earl had died—just the hour of the October twilight when his spirit passed away; but there was no other resemblance between the scenes. Here all was a pleasant stir of bustle and excitement; the new master who was coming had been dearly loved by most of those servants in his boyhood. None of them felt any real regret that the unexpected death of his step-brother and his baby son had made Gerald Carruthers twelfth Earl of Leigh.

"I remember him well," said the old house-keeper, wiping away a tear. "A handsome boy he always was."

"He'll be a middle aged man by now," chimed in the butler, "forty-five if he's a day, Mrs.

Bold, and looking older, most likely. India plays the very deuce with a man's constitution."

"And he's not married."

"Time enough yet; there's not a young lady would refuse him, the head of the house of Leigh."

A little pause in the hum of conversation, for wheels were heard approaching; the butler advanced and threw open the door just as a carriage stopped a moment later, and a tall, soldierly man, whose face was bronzed by exposure to the Indian sunshine, sprang from the brougham, and lightly mounted the steps.

He had left that house full twenty years before, a needy younger son, a detrimental, a nameless lieutenant, with nothing to depend on but his pay. Father, mother, and step-brother had looked coldly on him, because he had blighted their hopes, and, as they thought, shed discredit on them. And now he was back again, lord of all, head of the family, whose name he had once been termed. But there was nothing of joy or elation in his manner, when he said a few words, in reply to the earnest welcome proffered him. Those who had known

him best felt that a great change had come over him—kind and courteous as ever, but all the hope and gladness had died out of his voice.

"And my mother, Simmonds?" he asked at length.

"The Countess is upstairs in her own boudoir, my lord; she rarely leaves it now."

Lord Leigh walked up the broad staircase; he had no need to ask directions, he knew the room so well. A lady, beautiful and stately still, in spite of her age and feeble health, was reclining on a sofa near the fire. The Earl went up to her and took her hands.

"Mother."

"Gerald!"

That was all, but the very tone of his voice, the very sound of her reply, told that these two had been very near each other, and that though twenty years had elapsed since their parting—though, through her husband's influence, she had yet sent him away almost without farewell—no one in the whole world was so dear to the Countess of Leigh as this, her only child.

"You are not altered!" she said, fondly. "I should have known you anywhere!" He smiled.

"I am quite a venerable warrior by this time. I assure you I feel so!"

"And you have come home to stay?" eagerly.

"I must, I suppose!" he said, without any glances. "The Earl of Leigh can hardly remain a captain in a marching regiment."

"And you are not glad?"

"Can you expect it? Think of the past. Can an earldom—can a fortune—atone for that?"

"Money can do much," said Lady Leigh, eagerly; "and you are young still, Gerald!" He shook his head.

"Money can never atone for what I have suffered, mother. When your letter came I wished I was dead—life had lost its gladness for me!"

She trembled, no doubt from sympathy with his grief; he said no more of the past, but left her to prepare for dinner.

The world of fashionable life opened wide to admit the Earl of Leigh. He bid fair to be the lion of the coming season; wherever he went he was a favourite. The grave, earnest man, with his handsome melancholy face, was the object of general popularity. The question which hovered on all lips was—whom would his choice fall? What blushing Countess would chain his fancy, and become Countess of Leigh? The Earl little guessed the interest centred on his every movement. He accepted the civilities offered him with ready courtesy; he went everywhere, where it was pleasant on him to go; he danced, he conversed, he smiled, but he never paid the slightest attention to any young lady; he never gave any mother cause to hope that her daughter might become his countess.

"Gerald," his mother said to him one day, with the tears on her withered cheeks, "are you never to be happy? Must I never see your wife; never hold your children in my arms! Surely you have suffered enough! Surely for the sake of your name you will marry!"

Lord Leigh turned on her with flashing eyes.

"Never mention that subject to me, mother, if the same house is to hold us!"

"But, Gerald!"

"Hush!" he said, passionately; "I know all that you would say. I know that to be faithful unto the dead is not a man's duty; but perhaps I am different to my fellows. I only know I have not forgotten; I never can forget!"

"It is so long ago," mused the Countess, sadly; "and she treated you very badly!"

"Do not take her name upon your lips!" he said, passionately; "but for your cruelty—but for my father's unkindness—she would have gone with me to India!"

"It was a merciful escape for you!"

"It wrecked my life, if that is what you mean."

That night, in the long silent hours, the Countess could not rest. A feverish excitement took possession of her. A girl's beautiful face seemed to haunt her; she seemed to hear a sweet despairing voice implore Heaven's mercy, as with a look of unutterable anguish its owner left her presence.

"It was for his sake," muttered the Countess; "such fibs are told every day; if he had been like other men he would have forgotten long ago!"

She had looked forward anxiously to her son's return, but his presence gave her little pleasure. A bitter pain reigned at her heart when she saw the silent gravity of his face. He was dearest to her on earth, and she had wrecked his happiness just to please her own cruel ambition. Well, he was rich and noble now, but did it bring him joy? Would he not give up wealth and honour readily for one glimpse of the woman from whom she had contrived to part him at such a cost?

He was always tender and considerate to

her save on that much-voiced question of his marriage; he consulted her wishes on all points, and yet the sight of him was a keen reproach to her, and she would rather he had stayed in India than have lived to see the wreck she had made of his happiness.

Lord Leigh had plenty to occupy his time; there were the papers and letters of his step-brother to be seen to, many to be destroyed; and to this task he devoted himself in his leisure hours. There had been but little sympathy between him and the dead man, yet there was something painful and repulsive to his feelings in turning over Reginald's private treasures and seeing more and more how narrow-minded and selfish his step-brother had been.

There was little interesting, little sentimental among the memories of the late Earl. He had been a man of few friendships and scanty affections, but there was one packet in the secret drawer which Gerald at first imagined to be love-letters. It was tied with blue ribbon, and endorsed in his brother's writing.

"To be destroyed."

Some uncontrollable impulse made the Earl break the seal of that packet instead of committing it to the flames, as he had done many others; a mist seemed to come before his eyes as he saw the contents. He at first looked at the letters which fell upon the table, then at the envelope directed to himself in a hand he had thought never to see again.

A moment's bitter reproach to the dead brother who had misled him—a moment's hungry yearning for the writer of the letters—and then Gerald sat down to read the lines his dear hand had traced.

The first was very simple, just an answer to the note he had sent announcing his departure for India—very short and very touching—full of the tender devoted love he had been taught to doubt.

"Take me with you, darling!" it concluded, "this life of concealment and deception is telling on me cruelly. Oh, Gerald! I cannot stay in England without you; I will be no hindrance to your profession if only you will let me come. I live now in everlasting fear that our secret will be known; I think sometimes the suspense will kill me."

The second was in a different strain, the writing hurried, blotted with tears.

"Mamma has been so cruel, Gerald. I cannot stay any longer! Dear, come to me here at once if you love me!"

And the date of the letter was when he was on his way to India, believing the short, cold note which declared she "was afraid of the climate, and would not think of resigning the pleasures of London to follow a lieutenant in a marching regiment," to be from his love.

The third was a piteous appeal to come to her at once—she had something to tell him. He must come, or she should die!

With his heart burning with indignation the Earl of Leigh took up the remaining letters; they were addressed to his mother, and gave him a key to all that had puzzled him. His heart's best love had been given to a beautiful girl in his own rank—both their families opposed it. She was betrothed to a man of far superior wealth—he was destined for an heiress. Too much in love to weigh the dangers of the step the two young lovers were privately married in London. Three months later, when Gerald's regiment was ordered to India, he wrote to his wife, then in the country with her parents, urging her to accompany him. He never doubted the cruel reply he received came from her. He wrote again and again, but no answer came; and at last his own mother, in a letter announced, as a piece of indifferent news, that Miss Castillon was dead.

And now—oh, his heart ached as he read the cruel fraud practised on them both—he had been sent out of the country, believing her heartless. She had been turned from her mother's house by cruel taunts.

Later on, when, in her despair, she applied to his family for news of him, she had been

told that the marriage was no marriage—that her unborn child would inherit an endless shame.

For years he had mourned her, though believing her false to him—cold and heartless. Now, as he read the tender lines—the piteous appeal—the anguish when she learned her wrongs—her bitter anxiety for the little one whose coming ought to have been her joy—his blood boiled within him! He felt he had been mad to believe all they told him—that he ought to have gone to her, and taken his dismissal only from her own lips.

And she might be alive. For five minutes that rapturous idea seemed possible. Then he knew whatever else they had lied about the fact of her death must be true. They had stated it on the authority of her own family. Well, it would have been cruel to wish it otherwise. What would have been her fate through all these years? He shuddered as he thought of it.

Well, though she had died believing him a villain, he had this consolation—she had been all he once thought her—noble, loving, generous and true.

He took the papers in his hand and went straight to the Countess. "Something in my hand," he said, "she knew all, and she quailed beneath his gaze."

"Mamma help me!" he cried, bitterly, "since even the mother who bore me has played me false. I knew everything! I don't care now. Oh, mother! why did you let yourself to such a vile scheme? How could you not take care to plan my safety?"

She was sobbing piteously, yet, after all, it was relief. He knew the truth. The weary pleading and scheming was all over now.

"I never thought you would care so much!"

"Not even I! Why I loved her as my own life! Do you think I can ever have a happy moment, knowing she had doubted me, that our child—"

His mother gave way, then he laid his head in her hands, and the hot tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Forgive me!" pleaded the wretched woman. "Oh, Gerald! I think I have suffered more than she did. I have never known a happy moment since! When the news of her death came I felt I would have given years of my own life to rescue her and undo the past."

"She is dead?" he asked, scornfully. "That is not a lie like the rest!"

"She died before you had been two years in India. I was calling on Mrs. Castillon one day, and she was in mourning. She told me that it was for her daughter."

"Ah, she relented then, and went to her."

"No, she told me the news came from a source she could not doubt."

"Do you think she suspected?"

"She never suspected that you were the lover for whose sake that brilliant match was broken."

"He did not grieve. He married soon enough?"

"Within the year; but he did grieve, Gerald. I think it wrecked his life."

"And you know no more? Bah! I am a fool to ask you!"

She clasped her withered hands together. There was no mistaking her earnestness.

"As Heaven is my witness, Gerald, I would tell you all I knew. I have repented that cruel fraud-bitterly. My boy, don't you think it is punishment enough to see you as you are, to know that for all time you will lead a lonely life, and that it is my work?"

"Would it be of any avail for me to go and see Mrs. Castillon? I could at least take her the certificate of my marriage, and clear my darling's memory?"

"Gerald, it is too late! Mrs. Castillon died last year. There is nothing to be done. For your own sake, I wish you had never found those wretched papers. Again and again I implored your brother to destroy them."

"I would rather have seen them. At least I know my darling was good and true; at least I may worship her in my heart as all my own."

"My poor boy!"

"Did you ever see her?"

"No."

"And this?" touching the third letter "is really the last you heard?"

"Not quite."

"What then? Tell me all. Oh! mother, surely you owe me that."

"When the time was drawing near, when I thought she might be in absolute need of money, I sent her five pounds. I put it in an envelope and wrote inside—'For the child.'"

"Yes—and—"

"The money came back by return of post, endorsed, 'My child needs nothing at your hands.' I knew then that the baby was dead. I think my punishment began then, Gerald. I had lost babies of my own, and I longed to go and comfort her."

"His child, his nameless, disowned child! It pierced Lord Leigh's very heart."

"He rose abruptly."

"I am going out, mother; I shall call at the place she dated that last letter from, they may tell me a little about her—how she looked and spoke at the last. It's nineteen years ago, and yet I hunger to hear."

"Say you forgive me first. Oh! Gerald, my punishment is harder than I can bear."

"He hesitated."

"She would forgive you," he said, at last.

"If I am ever to meet her again I must forgive you, too; but oh! mother, we might have been so happy and—and—you have spoilt it!"

"A pleasant reflection for the old woman whose end was so near—her miserable pride had wracked the happiness of her only child."

"It was easy to find the road, where that last letter to his mother had been written; it was one of the many turnings out of the Tottenham Court-road, a district which had changed but little in the course of time."

"Lord Leigh felt nearer to his lost wife as he mounted the steps of No. 25, and wondered sadly how often her weary feet had trodden them."

"I want to see your mistress," he told the servant, and presently a respectable-looking old woman appeared, who, with one glance at his general *look ensemble*, feared terribly her "rooms would hardly be grand enough."

"I do not want apartments, madam," said the Earl of Leigh, with the strange, sad courtesy which had charmed so many hearts.

"I have come to ask a few questions on a subject very important to me. I will not keep you long if you will kindly assist me."

"She led the way into the front parlour, a little disappointed, but not ill-pleased to have a gossip with such a handsome gentleman, who spoke as though he were a real born lady."

"Have you lived here long, Mrs. —?"

"Hales, sir."

"Ah! Mrs. Hales, have you been in this house long?"

"Five-and-twenty years come Michaelmas."

"His heart gave a bound."

"Then you will be able to help me. I am anxious to trace a young lady who lodged here nineteen or twenty years ago. I think you will remember her; she was very young and pretty, with brown hair and blue eyes. I think she was alone and—in sorrow."

"A light broke on the woman's face."

"I mind her well," she said, almost seizing hold of Gerald's hand in her eagerness.

"You must mean Mrs. Carr Lee. Ah! it's many the time her face has haunted me. It was just the sweetest and saddest I ever saw, with a sort of scared look in her eyes, as though she was a hunted animal hiding from its enemies."

"At last he had found a clue."

"Who is to tell her?"

"That was the question which the two men who, perhaps, knew more than all the rest of the world of her adopted father's life asked

each other. That, without delay, the girl who called herself Lillian Earl must learn the truth was clear to them; but the kind-hearted soldier and the astute lawyer alike shrank from the task.

"It is Sir Ronald Trevlyn's place," said Mr. Martin, at last, very slowly. "Surely the news will be less painful coming from her future husband than a stranger."

"The other bit his lip impatiently."

"I tell you, Martin, you have not seen him. He has not a grain of chivalry in his disposition; he is a needy, struggling man, despite his title. When he knows Lillian has no fortune to free his encumbered acres, he will break the engagement as easily as you snap a burnt thread."

"I wish you had known to-night, and told him."

"Thank you," grimly. "I fancy I'd rather be excused."

"You see it would be less hard on her if she were here; but staying at the Court, thrown as it were utterly on their mercy, she is completely in their power."

"No more was said on the subject of Lillian Earl that night, only when the two friends met at breakfast, the solicitor said, suddenly,—

"I am going over to Trevlyn Court. It seems to me I have no choice but to bear your cousin's last letter to his adopted daughter."

"I will go with you," not to be outdone in generosity; "while you break the news to the poor girl I may as well enlighten the Trevlyns."

"The offer was accepted, and by twelve o'clock the two reached the Court, only to be met by the tidings that Sir Ronald had gone to London on business. His mother was in the drawing-room, Miss Earl was in her own apartment."

"There was little difficulty in gaining admittance. Captain Beaumont followed the footman, and a trim maid took Mr. Martin upstairs."

"He saw a beautiful girl, almost a child, dressed in simple black, her golden hair gleaming in the autumn sunshine. At the sight of her face he took courage. She was so lovely, that any betrothed would surely pardon her her lack of birth and fortune! She was so young and helpless, no man could have it in his heart to desert her in her sorrow!"

"The mystery of her parentage was still unsolved; but, even before she spoke, the shrewd man of the world knew that she was no stray foundling adopted from charity or pity, but the daughter of some house as noble as that to which she had so long been supposed to belong."

"He went up to her and took her hand."

"My dear, I was Lord Earl's trusted friend and servant. When he made his will fifteen years ago he left you to my guardianship; you must let me take what care I can of you, for his sake."

"She pressed his hand gratefully."

"You are very kind, but I do not think I shall have to trouble you. Lady Trevlyn wishes me to stay with her until—"

"Until you become her son's wife. It is a most suitable and fitting arrangement. When did she suggest it?"

"The day before yesterday, I think, when she first knew of my trouble."

"And she still wishes it?"

"I have not seen her to-day," said Lillian, simply; "the servant said she was lying down, but I am quite sure she is not one to change."

"I must ask you some painful questions," he said, slowly. "Miss Lillian, did you ever hear where you were born?"

"No suspicion of his meaning came to her."

"I suppose in France. Papa never cared to speak about that time, I think, because my mother died so soon afterwards. I know I lived with an old nurse until I was two years old."

"Can you bear a great shock?"

"Sir Ronald is well?" said the girl, wearily.

"Nothing else can touch me now. Papa and

he were all I had. But for him I stand alone in the world."

In perfect silence he handed her Lord Earl's letter.

"She opened it at once."

He turned his chair so as not to seem to watch her face. He had not long to wait. In five minutes she turned to him with a bitter cry.

"Oh! Mr. Martin, is it true?"

"Is what true, my dear?"

"Wasn't he my father? Wasn't I his own child? Oh! if you knew how happy he made me—how much we loved each other!"

"You were the child of his love—he was your adopted father. But, forgive me, others will tell you if I don't—you are not Lillian Earl."

"But who am I?"

"I do not know."

"He says that you will tell me. He begs me to forgive him for keeping the secret so long, as though I had anything to forgive. He loved me, I loved him. Nothing in all the world can alter that."

"And the letter really gives no clue?"

She shook her head.

"He must have meant to confide the story to me when I came down about the new will," decided the lawyer. "I can only tell you that I know no more than I have said. Your happiness was Lord Earl's chief thought. Unluckily in his anxiety for it he has left you cruelly ignorant of all you ought to know."

"I don't think I can bear any more," she said, faintly, putting up one hand to her aching brow. "I have lost him. He was never my father at all! I think I can realize no more."

"I am told Sir Ronald has gone to London. I regret it very much. I wished particularly to see him. You know, Miss Lillian, I consider you my ward. Unfortunately Lord Earl destroyed his will, and no other can be found. But, just the same, I am bound to look after your interests."

"My interests?"

"Don't you see, my dear, the fearful injury the loss of the will brings you. You have been considered heiress of Earlsmere and its revenues. Your wedding portion was to have been fifty thousand pounds, and now—"

"Now I am nameless, and a beggar."

"It was the truth. He could not contradict her. He would never have spoken the fact so plainly, but since she had found out her own position he would not deny it."

"I don't think I mind that so much," said the poor girl, sadly. "I loved Earlsmere dearly, but I could bear the loss of that. It is knowing I never had a right to his love, that I never had a right even to his name, that nearly kills me."

"It is a frightful change. You bear it very bravely. Few girls would lose such a fortune so calmly."

She smiled wistfully.

"Money doesn't make people happy, Mr. Martin! Papa, I mean Lord Earl, was never happy with all his wealth. If Ronald and I are to be poor, at least we shall have each other!"

"You think, then, the engagement will continue?"

She looked at him with indignation flaming in her blue eyes.

"He loves me; it was myself he sought, not Lord Earl's fortune. Can you think Sir Ronald will mind that I am poor?"

"I think he will be a scoundrel if he does."

Her mood changed then, her blue eyes filled with tears.

"Do you mean that I ought to give him up? Do you think that as things are now I must not let him keep his promise? Should I be a disgrace, a burden to him?"

The lawyer felt a choking sensation in his throat.

"You would be a treasure, a comfort, and I doubt not he will soon come and tell you so. In the meantime I think it would be better for you to return with me to Earlsmere."

"It seems like doubting him."

"It is nothing of the sort, it is but natural you should desire to be in your own old home, and to look your last on your adopted father. Besides, I really need your assistance in many matters; indeed, I think you had better come."

"What will Lady Trevlyn think when she hears I am leaving her so unceremoniously, after all her kindness to me?"

"I will explain matters to her. No doubt she is a lady of common sense, and will understand my motives."

He was sitting facing the window which looked out upon the carriage-drive. To his own surprise he saw Captain Beaumont walking rapidly down the avenue to the waiting brougham. A strange misgiving seized him that the interview with the mistress of the dwelling had sped badly; he had no time to even hint such a thing to Lillian, when the door was abruptly thrown open, and a lady entered, attired in rustling black silk.

Mr. Martin bowed to her. Lillian advanced with outstretched hand, but Lady Trevlyn waved her back, and addressed herself to the lawyer.

"I have come to request you to remove this young person from Trevlyn Court at once, I really do not know how otherwise to designate her, since now that her vile conspiracy is discovered she is practically nameless."

Intense surprise and bewilderment robbed Lillian of speech, but Mr. Martin was equal to the emergency.

"I was even now advising this young lady to leave your house; at any rate, until it was known whether her altered circumstances would induce Sir Ronald Trevlyn to break his word."

"His word was given to Miss Earl," said my lady furiously, "not to an unknown foundling, who may be a convict's daughter for aught that we can tell."

"I fancy Sir Ronald is of age. He will probably follow his own way in this matter."

"He will never bring home a wife who has not even a name—who would be a daily, hourly disgrace—who has deceived him as cruelly and vilely as woman could!"

The lawyer turned to the trembling girl.

"Miss Lillian, if you will kindly put on your things at once I should like to return to Earlsmere." Then, as she came back ready for the drive,—"Sir Ronald will, doubtless, come there to prove he has neither part nor share in his mother's doings."

Lady Trevlyn turned on Lillian with bitter scorn.

"Fool that I was to be taken in! I might have known you were some boggar's child when Lord Earl said you were your mother's image; and I knew you had no features of his dead wife's face!"

The solicitor had drawn the girl's hand through his arm, but she turned to Lady Trevlyn with a last appeal.

"I never knew it! I had no suspicion that I was not what you—what the world thought me! Oh, have pity on me! I have no mother to love me! Remember, you have called me your daughter, and be pitiful—say one kind word before we part!"

But Lady Trevlyn drew her dress away, as though she feared defilement in the girl's very touch.

"Pity! I wish you could be prosecuted for the imposture! I believe you knew it all along, and gloried in deceiving us! You won my boy's heart—the memory of you will blight his life! Forgive me, indeed! Speak kindly to you! Why, I hate you! If I could do you any injury I would! You ought to be hunted from all respectable society!"

For the victim's own sake Mr. Martin made no retort. He almost carried the drooping form downstairs, and placed her in the brougham.

Captain Beaumont had alighted as soon as they appeared in sight, and stood with rare delicacy at a little distance; but when the orphan was seated, the soldier advanced to his friend's side.

"That woman must be a demon!"

It was so entirely the lawyer's own opinion that he bowed his head in assent.

Then he inquired of the servant, who stood waiting to see them off, at what time Sir Ronald might be expected home; and left a message, desiring the baronet to call at Earlsmere.

"I shall walk home," said Cecil Beaumont, simply.

Mr. Martin would have gladly done so, too, but he thought his presence might be some comfort to the desolate girl, and so he placed himself opposite her.

For some time neither spoke; then, when the carriage had entered Earlsmere Park, she roused herself to ask,—

"Where are you taking me?"

"Home."

"But it is not home any longer! I have no right ever to see it again!"

"Be a good girl, and obey your guardian," he said, kindly. "I shall be at Earlsmere for a week or ten days; and while I am there you must stay too."

"Mr. Martin, do you believe it?"

"What?"

"What Lady Trevlyn said."

"She said a good many untrue things. Angry women often do."

"Should I really be that—a burden and a disgrace. Oh, Mr. Martin, will he think so, too? Can he possibly believe I knew this all along, and kept it from him?"

"Not if he's a spark of manly feeling—and if he could believe such a thing you'd be better off without him."

She did not speak again. When they reached Earlsmere she went upstairs to her own room; she did not even come down to lunch; she lay on her little lonely bed, looking white and broken—like one of her namesake flowers after a storm of wind or rain.

She shed no tears, uttered no word of complaint. She had wept bitterly for the man she called her father, but for her home, her name and fortune, she could not weep; she seemed steeling herself into an awful calm as she awaited Sir Ronald's decision. The fearful suspense was almost beyond her strength; she was incapable of thought and effort; she only waited in terrible forced composure until her lover came or wrote.

And for three days he did neither. Dr. West declared him to be still in London, and as they had not got his address it was impossible to send a letter to him. At last the news came that he had returned to the Court, and he wrote a few lines briefly to Mr. Martin, saying that for the sake of his father's friendship with Lord Earl he should wish to attend the funeral. "I consider your late client has done me a cruel wrong," concluded the baronet, "but I am not willing to cast an open slight on his memory by absenting myself."

So the master of Trevlyn followed Lord Earl to the grave, and then returned with the other mourners to Earlsmere. He waited beyond the rest, and from that Mr. Martin gathered a ray of hope.

"You would like to see Miss Earl?"

"I wish to see her I once thought Lillian Earl, and alone," he said, speaking with painful distinctness.

"You will find her in the drawing-room."

No one announced him. He went upstairs alone, and entered the room where one week before he had wooed Lillian with passionate love. She sat in a low chair by the fire, and, to his eyes, she looked more beautiful than ever; her deep mourning suited her fragile loveliness, the dreamy sadness of her blue eyes showed that her thoughts were very far away.

Sir Ronald closed the door noiselessly, and came towards her. He had had a very stormy interview with his mother before he presented himself at the funeral at all. "He would not surely be so foolish as to throw himself into the toils of that siren; a penniless wife meant ruin to him, and this girl was worse than penniless." Sir Ronald had answered shortly his future was his own business. He hardly knew what he meant to do; he was certainly

not prepared to renew the engagement openly and to marry Lillian before the world, but he loved her. It was not an unselfish love, but it was intensely passionate; he could not bear the thought that her beauty might belong to another—that the lips he had kissed would be another's property. He wanted rank and wealth in his wife, but he wanted Lillian, and so, unsettled, wavering as he had never done before, he came into her presence.

He was at her side before she saw him; then she looked up, and for one instant the piteous pleading of the blue eyes made him forget everything in the world but her. He opened his arms, and gathered her to his heart.

"I thought you would come!"

"I only got back last night."

He kissed her passionately on brow and lip. He knew quite well that probably he would never so hold her again, that when he had said what was in his mind his lips and hers would, perhaps, never meet.

He had cared for very few people in his life, but he did care for Lillian—how much he never knew until he realized he might have to give her up.

"You know all?" she whispered.

"Everything. My darling, it is a cruel fate for you—father, home, and name—to lose all in a week."

She raised her blue eyes to his, as though she would read him through and through.

"Your mother!"

"My mother is ambitious; she has very little sympathy with such a trial as ours."

"And you have come to say 'good-bye.'"

Unless kisses were his answer he gave none. He was vainly thinking how it would be possible to satisfy them both—his love and his ambition.

"It is hard to give you up," she murmured.

"Need you do so? You love me, Lillian?"

"I love you—"

"And you are not ambitious; I have heard you say again and again you cared nothing for wealth and rank."

"I don't care for them for myself."

"And you love me—you would give up something for my sake?"

The clinging touch of her arms was his best answer.

"Dear," he said, with a new, strange gentleness; "I am not rich! As things are I cannot marry you, and give you the position and wealth which are due to Lady Trevlyn. At least one-half my income is really my mother's—hers to dispose of as she pleases."

"And she would disinherit you?"

"Yes."

"Then I will release you from your word, Ronald. It is hard to give you up, but you must not make such a sacrifice!"

"There is another way," he whispered, passionately. "Be my wife, my love, my darling, without taking the whole world into our confidence? Let us keep our secret until brighter days come! I will find you a home where my mother's anger can never touch you. You wouldn't be less happy because no one knew that we had followed the advice of our own hearts. Leave this place alone; I will meet you in London, and in half-an-hour no one on earth will be able to separate us!"

He held her still in that close, passionate embrace; his lips were pressed to her cheek, his hand toyed with her waving hair. She knew she loved him better than life itself; in the wide world he was all she had.

How could she refuse him? How could she give him up? Her heart beat as loudly as if it would break its bonds. She could hear his suppressed emotion in his deep, agitated breathing as he waited for her answer.

(To be continued.)

THE SAVAGE who never knew the blessings of combination, and he who quits society from apathy or misanthropic spleen, are like the separated embers, dark, dead, useless; they neither give nor receive heat, neither love nor are beloved.

JUST LET THE SUNSHINE IN.

Let in the golden sunlight,
Yes, open wide the door,
And gloom will quickly vanish—
Life's brightness come once more.
Drink in the healthy nectar,
That God doth give to thee—
The bracing air of heaven—
The light so pure and free.
Throw every window open,
And sadness will depart;
The sky will smile upon you,
And beautify the heart.

Let in the golden sunlight
When you are sad with pain,
And bliss will come to cheer you,
Your heart will smile again;
The darkest clouds will vanish,
Fair rainbows span the sky,
And sunless hours will leave you
When happiness is nigh.
Then open wide each window,
And healthful vigour win—
If you would be contented,
Just let the sunshine in.

Let in the golden sunlight!
Its priceless wealth untold
Will bring you many pleasures,
And warm the heart that's cold.
How many suffer anguish,
And paths of gloom pursue,
Who close Life's windows ever,
And keep no light in view.
But if they would be happy,
And priceless blessings win,
With life, and health, and vigour,
Just let the sunshine in.

D. C. M.

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE door of the room into which Mr. Mallon had penetrated before was wide open. Childish toys were lying on the table, strings of beads ready to be made into elegant necklaces, figures cut out in cardboard, with impossible-looking horses, on which they were to be made to ride by means of a cardflap fixed on to the back of their habits—engines to be wound by a mechanical contrivance, dolls that would have been willing to squeak if anybody had volunteered to pinch their bodies, &c., &c.

What did it mean? Evidently money had been lavished freely for the amusement of some child, and Victor involuntarily doubted if there were not some story of shame linked with the mystery that surrounded the lonely place.

It could have nothing to do with Robin; memory pleaded for her, as it brought back her sweet face, pale as a fragile Devonian, with the wistful eyes of a hunted stag.

Only a few hours before she must have been here; the fire was still burning dully behind its grating—and there was the chair on which she had probably sat—he could just see its outline in the dim twilight.

There were some tall candles on the mantelpiece; he lighted one of them and looked round, inspecting every corner, and every inch of the carpet, but there was no stain of blood on the floor—no sign of a tragedy in the innocent aspect of the room, with its gay hangings and brilliant paper.

With the candle in his hand he walked about the silent passages, trying every door that he came to; they were all locked except one, and the draught of air from its open window blew out the light, and left him once more in utter darkness. Setting it down on the floor, he pulled out his box of matches and lighted it again; then feeling that, perhaps, at last he would find the key of the mystery, he walked into Sarah Prendergast's room, and cast an anxious glance round.

It was in disorder, as if the last person who was in it had been in a dreadful hurry.

Some of the drawers were open, with articles of wearing apparel hanging out of them, and a bandbox with a broken lid was on the table.

He examined it curiously. There was the printed name of a milliner in Oxford-street, with "Miss Smith," written above it. Smith was said to be the name of the owner of the house, and no doubt Robina passed either as his sister or daughter. Then he went to the window and looked out, expecting to see a heap of clothes shrouding a motionless form, but there were only the cold slates speckled here and there with flakes of snow.

He got out on to the roof, as Robin had done, and peered over the balustrade into the darkness, but he could see nothing on the gravel path beneath, and went in with a shudder, feeling that some eye might be watching him from the shadow of the evergreens.

There was a bunch of keys lying on the table; he pounced upon them eagerly, and catching up the candle proceeded to try each one of them in turn on all the locked doors. Behind some he found mouldy furniture, behind others nothing but dust and emptiness. It was bitterly cold, and he grew sick and tired of always looking for what he never found; but thinking of the reward that awaited him he forced himself to persevere.

There was only one door left at the end of the passage. He opened it with difficulty for the lock was somewhat rusty, and, holding the candle above his head, saw straight in front of him a travelling trunk with the initials R. S., painted in white letters on the cover.

Underneath it was another trunk, and behind it several boxes. This was the luggage which she had brought with her from Devonshire. On the boxes there were labels with the name of Smith scrawled upon them, which showed that the *alias* had been adopted from the first, only the initials were probably forgotten. And yet—R. S., after all, might stand for Rosa Smith as well as Robina Somerville.

With a sigh he acknowledged the possibility, but immediately remembered the voice that Dulcie heard. No one but little Robin was likely to have wearied for Victor's coming. She must have been there on Thursday, and if she were anywhere above ground he would find her still.

After inspecting every corner of the house he made his way to the stables; there, like the rest of the place, solitude reigned supreme, but there were signs in one of the stalls as if it had lately been inhabited by a horse, and a fresh feed of corn in the manger showed that it was expected to return.

He pulled out his watch, feeling as if he had spent hours in this lonely spot, but found that it was only six o'clock. It would take the best part of an hour to ride home, and it would not do to be late for dinner, and brave all sorts of questions as to the cause.

He went back to the house, and stood irresolutely on the doorstep wondering what he had better do with the keys. If Prendergast returned with her charge it would give him a hold over her to have them in his possession. If he locked the outer door she would naturally conclude that somebody had been there after her; but if he left it just as he found it, she would remember that she had forgotten it in her hurry, and simply suppose she had mislaid the bunch when she could not find it.

After thinking the matter over he turned his back on the weird-looking place with a shudder, then running quickly down the gloomy drive hid the keys in a bed of nettles just outside the gate, and returned to fetch his horse.

Poor Buttercup resented having been left so long in the cold, and after shaking his head and snorting stretched his legs with every intention of getting to his warm stables as quickly as possible.

Mr. Mallon, being anxious about the time, let him go at his own pace, and the trees and hedges flew past as in a bad dream, whilst the cold wind whistled in his ears. It was an unpleasant evening to be out in, and the dreary

mystery of Nun's Tower seemed to cling to him like a nightmare.

Where had Robin flown? Was it of her own free will, or had she been dragged away against her wish in order to secure the success of some fiendish plot?

He kept asking himself question after question as he rode on, and never found a satisfactory answer. The clue seemed to be lost in those empty stone walls, and the chance of finding it more remote than ever.

It was strange, because Somerville never left Silcotes till three o'clock, and any luncheon or early dinner, whichever they called it, must have been over long before he could reach the Tower—and yet the scare or the summons had evidently come before the meal was begun. It was unpremeditated, of that he was quite sure from the testimony of his own eyes; but that was no reason why they should ever come back.

Still a messenger would be sure to be sent for their goods and chattels, and that messenger must be intercepted or followed.

If he was accessible to a bribe they might get the truth from him. And after they had met the lost girl face to face Somerville would be able to hold out no longer.

And then the day might dawn when he could hold Dulcie's hand in his and claim her for his wife before all the world.

With a smile on his face he rode into the stable-yard just as the clock was striking seven.

Meta ran out into the hall to meet him. "I thought it was Godfrey!" she said, stopping still in her disappointment at the sight of his red beard.

"Is he out?" pricking up his ears. "I thought I must be the latest of all; but it is a long way from Deepden, and I was delayed on the road."

"Then you didn't see anything of him?"
"Not a trace. Was he likely to come my way?"

"I don't know. Wherever he went, it is odd that he should not be in by this time. How cold you must be!" looking at his hands, which almost matched his hair in colour.

"I'm frozen; and yet the frost has gone, as you can see by my boots. Where's Vere?"

"Playing billiards with my father."

"I'm not fit to show myself, so I think I will take myself upstairs. You had a pleasant drive, I hope!" remembering his natural courtesy, in spite of his preoccupation.

"Yes, thank you," in a dispirited tone.
"One of the horses took fright at something white they saw in a hedge. And mamma was dreadfully frightened. Mr. Hargreaves laughed at her, and I think it did her good."

"I am glad of that," with a smile; "but I suppose it was nothing but a post?"

"I can't be sure; mamma said it was a cow, but I thought from the glimpse I caught of it that it was a girl."

"Was this going or coming back?"
"On the way there?"

"You are sure it was a girl?"
"Not at all," with a little laugh. "It might have been anything; but don't look so grave, it really didn't matter."

"It would matter if Lady Somerville were to be frightened for a second time. I think," looking up thoughtfully, "it would certainly be better for me to go there and investigate."

"Oh dear, no! It would be too ridiculous. We came home by another way; and I dare say, after all, it was a post."

"Then what could make you think it was a girl?"

"It seemed to move; but I only saw it out of the corner of my eye, and you know how easy it is to be deceived when you are going rather fast. I thought I saw a lot of dark hair; but no one has their hair hanging down, so that it must have been fancy."

Hair hanging down like the girl whom he had seen behind the blind—that decided him, and he moved towards the door which led through several passages to the stable-yard

"Daisy is quite fresh, and it will do her rather good than not."

"But yourself! You said you were frozen; and you've had no dinner. Really it's too absurd."

"Don't let Sir Edward wait for me. If I'm late, tell him the reason after I have gone," and he disappeared.

Meta looked after him in real distress. It was excessively kind of him, but so foolish that she was sure Lady Somerville would be more vexed than pleased.

He came back in a hurry.

"I forgot to ask you the place."

"It was on the road to Alverley, just beyond the cross-roads, on the right hand side near a hay-stack; but I do wish you wouldn't go."

"After what you have told me," he said, veraciously, "I couldn't rest."

As he got on Daisy's back he wondered if it were instinct which was dragging him out so much against his inclination into the murky darkness of that winter's evening. He had taken nothing but a glass of brandy-and-water which the butler had insisted upon his having to keep the cold out, and he had the natural appetite of a healthy man when the dinner-hour is near.

If he could only be sure that he would do any good by going on this wild-goose chase—if it would bring him but one inch nearer his end, dinner would be of no account at all; but as it was, he thought of it rather regretfully, as the fumes of varied dainties pursued him down the passage, and his groom answered his summons with his mouth full.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The dinner at the Hall was a very quiet one that night, though Cyril Vere exerted himself to be exceptionally agreeable. Meta, perturbed by Godfrey's absence, contributed little to the conversation, and Lady Somerville, annoyed at Mr. Mallon's chivalrous consideration for herself, retained a continual pucker on her usually placid forehead.

Nella had lost the racking pain in her head, but felt too tired to do more than talk gently every now and then, though she knew it was a golden opportunity for making hay whilst the sun shone—Somerville being out of the way, and Cyril sitting by her side.

"Where did you go for your lonely walk?" he asked presently, with a slight relaxation of his late stiffness of manner.

"Down the shrubbery, and up the road to Alverley," raising her head to meet his smile, as a thirsty flower revives at the first drop of rain.

"And you met with no adventures on the way?"

"No labourers with an alarming eye on my pocket. I was rather afraid I should, for I started later than I intended."

"You didn't come across Somerville?" from Sir Edward, at the bottom of the table.

The slightest hesitation in the world, whilst a wave of crimson rose to her cheeks, and then,—

"How could I? Colonel Deynourt's place is quite the other way!"

"I know—I know; but, upon my word, I thought he had hurried home politely on purpose to have a walk with you."

"Not likely," with a little laugh. "Mr. Somerville would not put himself out for me."

"No?" inquiringly from Cyril. "Then you never met him after all?"

"I told you I was going alone," carefully investigating the pudding on her plate.

"But I thought you would not manage it. Were the roads as empty as a desert?"

"Not quite."

"Were you startled, like Lady Somerville, by something white in the hedge?"

"I wasn't startled at all—at least," remembering her sudden run into the hedge, "by nothing white."

"By something black then?" watching her face intently, though he put his question in a tone of the lightest badinage.

"How absurd you are! I am not in the habit of being frightened at gates and posts."

"But by a sudden stoppage on a lonely road?"

"Nella, you weren't stopped by any one?" broke in Meta, excitedly.

"I never said I was," laughing uneasily; "it is only Cyril's nonsense."

"He evidently didn't wear a labourer's white jacket," said Vere, quietly. "Was it a brown coat or a black? Did he look like a farmer, a hailiff, or a gentleman?"

"Perhaps you were there, and can tell me!" trying to carry it off with a high hand.

"I was not there," in a low voice, "or he wouldn't have been."

"I tell you I went out alone, and came back alone, so you needn't tease me any more."

A diversion was created by the entrance of Mr. Mallon, who had come in cold, tired, and dejected, and had only given himself ten minutes for his toilette. He wanted to be allowed to have a bit of dinner at a side-table, in order not to put them out, but to this Lady Somerville would not agree.

He had gone out in her service, and she was inclined to make much of him in consequence.

Soup and fish were brought back, and the hungry man was allowed to eat and drink before being plied with questions. When he came to the haunch of mutton stage, he turned to his hostess, and said, with a grave smile,—

"I have found out your ghost—it was a girl in a white dress."

Cyril stared, whilst the others exclaimed in surprise,—

"Fancy a white dress this weather!" said Lady Somerville with a shiver. "Who was she? And where did she come from?"

"Nobody seems to know," with a glance at Vere, who answered it immediately by a question.

"What has become of her?"

"I tried to find out; but it was no good. I made inquiries in every direction,"—with a sigh.

"I am sure it was very good of you," said Lady Somerville, quite touched by his earnestness.

"Won't you have some currant-jelly? George," to one of the footmen—"the jelly to Mr. Mallon."

"I don't suppose you heard anything of Somerville?" inquired Sir Edward, still disturbed about his nephew.

"He was seen by a little boy, who seemed to be unusually intelligent, riding full gallop down the road to Alverley-station; but the station-master declared that he hadn't been there."

"About what time?"

"Four o'clock, or soon afterwards—the boy can't have imagined it."

"Brookfield (the station-master) must have seen him," said Sir Edward; "besides, that was just the time when Miss Maynard was walking along that same road, and a horse at full gallop must have attracted her attention, even if she had not recognized Godfrey."

"I saw a horse going very fast," she began eagerly, seeing a chance of clearing herself in Cyril's eyes.

"Perhaps it startled you?" said Vere, with a slight emphasis.

"Was no one on his back?" with sudden anxiety from the baronet.

"Oh, yes, someone—but it was going so fast," she added, confessedly.

"Still I should have thought you would have known Godfrey," said Meta, who thought she would have been able to identify him anywhere, without any light to speak of.

"He passed me so quickly—and it was growing dark."

"Strange that he shouldn't have pulled up, for he must have seen you!"

"Not at all, Mr. Vere," and Meta looked slightly cross, "he was evidently in a great hurry."

"I never said it was Mr. Somerville!" said Nella, hastily.

"You never said it wasn't," and Cyril looked down his nose at her.

"What does it matter? I am tired of his name; let us talk of something else."

"By all means; I thought it interested you!"

"Then you are mistaken. Why are you cross with me again?" looking up into his face with very wistful eyes. "I have done nothing to offend you."

"Oh, nothing at all. I know I have no right to interfere"—his shirt collar seemed suddenly to have become of a most masher-like description.

"I should hate you if you didn't," her eyes sparkling, her breast-heaving under the pink camellia in the front of her dress.

"Then I will give you one bit of advice," leaning forward so that no one else might hear him. "When you go to doubtful interviews, take care not to leave a trace behind."

"I don't know what you mean. Doubtful interviews, indeed! There is no one whom I should take the trouble to meet, as you mean—on the sly."

Then she rose from the table in obedience to a sign from her hostess, and followed her into the drawing-room.

Cyril looked after her with a puzzled expression on his face. She looked so perfectly honest, and yet how could he possibly believe her with that red bow in his pocket?

All that evening Meta could settle to nothing. What had become of Godfrey? That was the only question that puzzled her brain. To gallop along the roads, seemed so extraordinary, unless there were some particularly pressing business on hand; and what could that business be which had cropped up so unexpectedly in the course of a ride home?

Every one seemed glad when it was time to go to bed, and the gentlemen retired to the smoking-room as soon as they decently could.

"Good night, dear; don't fuss yourself," and Nella deposited a kiss on Meta's cheek, as they stood together on the landing outside her bedroom. "I daresay Mr. Somerville has gone up to town to the theatre. He was talking of it the other night."

"Then it was too bad of him not to tell us, keeping us all in a fidget about him," a transient fit of anger flushing her cheek. "He might have fallen from his horse, and be dragged along with his foot in the stirrup," puckering up her face for a cry.

"I think Pearl would have come home if he hadn't. Don't you remember another time, he disappeared for a whole day, and would give no account of his actions?"

"But that was in the daytime, and quite different."

"Well, go to bed, and, depend upon it, he will turn up at breakfast."

Meta shook her head disconsolately, but said no more, and retired to her room.

A spirit of restlessness possessed Nella that night, and she could not follow the advice she had given to her friend. She made up the fire, told the head housemaid, who acted as her maid, that she did not require her services, and seating herself in a comfortable armchair prepared to enjoy a particularly interesting novel.

Her thought, as usual, strayed to that provoking cousin of hers, whose special province it seemed to disturb her peace of mind, and she did not get on very fast with her book.

What had he meant by his innuendo about doubtful interviews, and the trace that had been left behind? She certainly had dropped nothing that afternoon, and if she had, he wouldn't have known it, though he seemed to have guessed intuitively that she had met Godfrey Somerville. Evidently he was bent on misunderstanding her, perhaps with a view to breaking the news gently of his engagement to Miss Arkwright.

And yet—wasn't it yesterday that he had stooped to kiss her hair, and looked at her with something very like tears in his eyes? "Oh man! what tiresome creatures they are!" she thought impatiently, as her book slipped down

on the floor, and reminded her of the little use she had made of it.

She stooped to pick it up, and became aware of a slight noise outside the door, as of footsteps creeping down the passage. Instantly her heart jumped into her mouth, and she jumped out of her chair, and blew out the candles.

Having thus secured herself from observation, she stole noiselessly to the door and listened, thinking perhaps it was a burglar, possibly Godfrey Somerville.

Curiosity was too much for her, and stronger than her nervousness, so she opened a little crack, and listened again. Certainly someone was moving about; and if it were Godfrey, she would like to see if he looked in such a desperate state of mind as he did before. She opened it a little wider, and emboldened by the darkness, put out her head.

The moment she had taken one look down the passage she drew it in again as if she had been bitten—and shut the door in feverish haste. Cyril and Mr. Mallon were stealing along the corridor on the tips of their toes, muffled in their slippers, as if they were going for a nocturnal walk; and Danvers, Mr. Mallon's valet, was following with a lighted candle in his hand.

What could they possibly be going to do out of doors, on a bitterly cold night, at past twelve o'clock?

CHAPTER XXX.

NELLA did not sleep much that night. Intensely curious to know what Cyril Vere and Mr. Mallon could possibly be after, she resolved to lie awake till they came in, but she was very tired, and fell asleep, almost as soon as she got into bed. Still her dreams were of the strangest description, and she woke up from time to time thinking that Godfrey was walking round her bed, with a lighted candle in his hand, which he was intent upon thrusting down her throat, or else that she was on the point of throwing herself out of the window, and Cyril was pulling her over the sill by means of her black hair.

At six o'clock she woke with a start, and instantly remembered that she had to be on the watch. Somebody was certainly passing her door, and she sprang out of bed, without thinking of the cold, to find out who that somebody was. The carpet felt like a sheet of ice, but she pattered across it with her bare feet, impelled by that same voice for which Eve fell. Opening the door as softly as she could, she saw the three men disappearing as before down the passage, but in a contrary direction—to, and not from, their rooms. Their boots and trousers were bespattered with mud, and they walked as if they had had quite enough exercise for the present.

When she heard their doors shut behind them she was just going to shut her own, when she remembered that something had fallen from one of them, which might betray their secrets to the public.

Now Nella was very kind-hearted, and although naturally irritated with Cyril for keeping her in the dark as to this mystery which hung round himself and his friend, she was loyally anxious to save him from betrayal. She had no scruple at all in trying to discover what he was bent on hiding; but she meant to keep any information she was able to glean for her own especial benefit.

Therefore she took the trouble to light a candle, and throw a dressing-gown over her shoulders, whilst she thrust her poor little cold toes into a pair of slippers.

Thus equipped she sallied forth, tremulously afraid lest either of the three might swoop down upon her from round a corner, or Somerville might come up from behind.

She held the candle very low, and looked along the crimson carpet. The light flickered so that she could scarcely see, but at last she perceived a small dark object lying close against the wall.

She stooped, pulling a great deal of wax on the floor, and, snatching it up in her hand,

hurried back to her room as if she were a thief in fear of being caught.

When safe within the shelter of the closed door she set the candle down on the table, and began to examine her treasure-trove. What was her immense surprise to discover that she held in her hand a fuzzy substance, strongly resembling one of Mr. Mallon's disfiguring red whiskers.

First she shook all over with convulsions of laughter, and then she began to speculate. If they had been handsome appendages, such as men used to delight in when long whiskers were the fashion, he might have put them on from motives of vanity; but no one in his senses could imagine that a flaring red fuzz on each side of his face could possibly improve his beauty. And if vanity were not the motive, there must be some other.

Hiding the ugly thing in a drawer she got back into bed to puzzle her brains more than ever. If it were not vanity it must be for the purposes of disguise.

With a sudden thrill of excitement she became convinced that, to use a slang expression, she had hit the right nail on the head—a person in disguise under the same roof as herself.

The idea was tremendously suggestive. A three-volume romance embodied in the form of one man, and that man a person with whom she came in daily contact! What could he have done that he was afraid to appear in his natural character? Who could he be, that Cyril Vere—the most honorable of men—had dared to present him to Sir Edward, and introduce him into the sanctity of his home under a false name? There was something so ridiculous about a fictitious whisker; it reminded her of the story she had once heard of the antiquated fop who dropped his eye-brow into his soup plate, and nearly met his death, because the fuzzy substance stuck in his throat; but it was too ridiculous to think they had a man in the house who might be an adventurer, or a ticket-of-leave, a forger, felon, or thief. He might have hoodwinked Cyril, and palmed himself off on him as a lonely individual who had but few friends in the world.

That would have touched Cyril's heart in a moment, and he would have been certain to stretch out the hand of friendship, because of the generosity of his nature, which was slow to suspect evil except in his cousin—and always prone to compassionate misfortune.

Meta was surprised to see Nella come in amongst the first to breakfast; but this fact was that she had been unable to get to sleep again, and had therefore lingered for her hot water in a way that was most unusual for her.

"You said he was sure to turn up this morning," said Miss Somerville dejectedly, as she handed Nella her coffee.

"Who? Mr. Mallon?"

"Godfrey, of course," with supreme contempt at the idea of troubling herself about Mr. Vere's ugly friend.

"Of course! Godfrey, I might have known. Well he may be coming; breakfast isn't ever yet; and he is generally late when he isn't early."

"So are most people, I believe," said Cyril, with a smile, though he took his place on the other side of the table, instead of in the empty chair by Nella.

"I am sorry to say Mallon won't be able to come down this morning."

"I scarcely thought he would," she couldn't help exclaiming, on purpose to make her cousin stare.

He opened his eyes a little wider, but went on composedly. "He was knocked up, I think, by that second ride, and he can't move."

Lady Somerville was greatly distressed. She knew that he would tire himself out, but she was so persistent in his kindness that no one could stop him. Had he a headache? Would he like some cold water?

"Thanks! I think he will get on very well, after he has had his coffee. Rivers was coming down to fetch a tray."

"Oh, dear, I hope they will send up something nice; those pheasant legs might tempt him."

"I don't think he has lost his appetite—only he felt he must stay where he was," his monstaches curling with a slight smile.

"I understand that feeling exactly," said Lady Somerville, sympathetically. "Did he have a good night?"

"I don't think he slept much," looking down on his plate.

"He was rather late, perhaps, in getting in bed," said Nella demurely.

"He came up unusually early."

"I dare say he did. Did you say he had some thing the matter with his face?"

"Well, he has; but I didn't think I mentioned it," looking puzzled.

"Ah, neuralgia," sighed Meta, "and there's nothing worse than that."

"You forget facial-paralysis," said Nella gravely, "which makes one side of your face look different to the other. Is that the case with Mr. Mallon?"

"Well, it struck me there was something odd about him," and Cyril nearly choked with suppressed laughter.

"Heaven bless me!" exclaimed Sir Edward in a fright. "We must send for the doctor at once."

"Pray don't," looking seriously alarmed. "Mallon would be furious!"

"But if that sort of thing once begins you don't know where it will stop, and he may be disfigured for life. I can't have such a responsibility on my shoulders," getting up from his seat; "and I shall go and tell him so."

"But you won't be able to see him, he's—he's just dropping off to sleep."

"I thought he was just going to eat his breakfast!"

"When he awakes, not before. I assure you the only thing he begged of me was to let no one come to him."

"Ah, poor fellow!" said Lady Somerville; "that is over-sensitiveness; but we can't let his health be ruined on that account. We can leave a message at Dr. Musgrave's house on the way to church."

"I assure you he wouldn't like it," and Cyril appeared quite anxious. "I am going up to town to-morrow, and I shall get him the only remedy that can cure him."

"What is it?" inquired Lady Somerville, with that intense interest in medicine which is peculiar to middle-aged matrons. "Not digitalis?"

"No, not digitalis; in fact, I don't exactly remember the name!"

"Perhaps it's *whiskeritis*?" suggested Nella, innocently. "Isn't there a plant of that kind which is peculiarly efficacious in cheek diseases?"

"My dear child, what are you thinking of? I don't think Mr. Mallon would approve of his misfortunes being turned into a joke," with a slightly offended air.

"Oh! but, Lady Somerville, I was quite in earnest. Cyril will tell you if I am not right."

Vere shook his head gravely, though inwardly puzzled as to how Nella could have found out the disaster which had happened to Mallon.

"I never heard of the medicine except in a hairdresser's shop."

"Meta, dear, I think it is time to put on our things," said her mother, pushing back her chair, "especially if we have to stop at Dr. Musgrave's on the way."

"But Mr. Vere says no."

"Are we to consider your decision final?" turning to him with a bland smile, as he held open the door for her.

"I think so. Mallon is a queer fellow to manage. He will be awfully grateful to you for thinking of it though."

Lady Somerville went upstairs, followed by Meta, who could take no interest in anything so long as Godfrey was missing. She knew that she would think of him through prayers and hymns, and lengthy sermon; but her mother would have been so scandalized if she had pro-

posed to stay away from church that she had not the courage to suggest it.

Nella lingered as she went through the door. Vere thought how pretty she looked in her brown cashmere, trimmed with velvet to match; but kept his flattering reflections to himself.

"Can you spare me two minutes for private conversation?" she said, gravely.

"A hundred, if you like," in immense surprise. "Where shall we have it?"

"In the boudoir, because there we shall be quite alone."

She led the way, and he followed, taking care to close the door behind him, as soon as he found himself in Lady Somerville's private sanctum.

"Well!" he said, eagerly, as he seemed in no hurry to begin, on purpose to tease him.

"Do you intend to get this remedy in town to-morrow?"

"Certainly!" with the utmost gravity.

"Why not?"

"Don't!" looking up at him, her eyes twinkling with mischief.

"Why not?" he repeated.

"Because I have it in my pocket!" and she burst into a low, sweet laugh.

His face of utter dismay sent her into a fit.

"Nella, what do you mean? Are you joking?"

She could not speak, but pulled a fuzzy end out of her pocket.

"For heaven's sake give it me," stretching out his hand.

"Not till you have told me everything I want to know," triumphantly. "And now I am off to church!"

(To be continued.)

THE OLDEN TIME.

THE following statistics of the good old winters are curious:—In 401 the Black Sea was entirely frozen over. In 768, not only the Black Sea, but the Straits of the Dardanelles, were frozen over; the snow in some places rose fifty feet high. In 822 the great rivers of Europe—the Danube, the Elbe, &c.—were so hard frozen as to bear heavy waggons for a month.

In 860 the Adriatic was frozen. In 991 everything was frozen; the crops totally failed, and famine and pestilence closed the year. In 1067, most of the travellers in Germany were frozen to death on the roads.

In 1182 the Po was frozen from Cremona to the sea; the wine casks were burst, and even the trees split by the action of the frost, with immense noise. In 1286 the Danube was frozen to the bottom, and remained long in that state. In 1816 the crops wholly failed in Germany; wheat, which some years before sold in England at six shillings the quarter, rose to two pounds.

In 1339 the crops failed in Scotland, and such a famine ensued, that the poor were reduced to feed on grass, and many perished miserably in the fields.

The successive winters of 1432-3-4 were uncommonly severe. It once snowed forty days without interruption.

In 1468 the wine distributed to the soldiers in Flanders was cut with hatchets.

In 1684 the winter was excessively cold. Most of the hollies were killed. Coaches drove along the Thames, the ice of which was eleven inches thick.

In 1709 occurred the cold winter. The frost penetrated three yards into the ground.

In 1616 booths were erected and fairs held on the Thames.

In 1744 and 1745 the strongest ale in England, exposed to the air, was covered, in less than fifteen minutes, with ice an eighth of an inch.

In 1809 and again, in 1812, the winters were remarkably cold. In 1814 there was a fair on the frozen Thames.

REDEEMED BY FATE.

CHAPTER XVII.

WALKING down the marble steps to the smooth, green level of the tennis lawn, Sir Jasper found Haidée and Muriel, in white flannel dresses, resting from their exertions under the leafy shadow of a walnut tree, while Philip stood by, racket in hand, talking to them.

"Have you been playing?" he asked, casting himself at Haidée's feet and beginning to fan her with a big black fan that had been lying on the turf.

"Yes. Mr. Greville against Lady Urwicke and myself. He was unchivalrous enough to beat us!"

"He ought to have been taught better!" said the baronet, with a laugh. "Don't you know"—turning to the artist—"the surest way to a lady's favour is to make her believe you wish her to be victorious in everything?"

"Even if you sacrifice truth in saying so?" demanded Philip.

"Ah! that is nothing! Truth and expediency very seldom join hands."

"I bow to your superior wisdom and experience, Sir Jasper!" answered Greville, deeply irritated by the calm air of possession with which the baronet had seemed to appropriate Haidée.

Sir Jasper's cold eyes scanned him closely, as if he suspected some double meaning in the remark, which he did not respond to.

Turning to Lady Urwicke he asked if she cared for a drive, and on her excusing herself, said to Haidée,—

"You will come, Miss Darrell? I have ordered an open carriage to be ready in half-an-hour, and if you have no objection I will take you to see the Grange—the house where you were born."

Haidée acquiesced immediately, and some little time later she drove off with Sir Jasper, jealously watched by Philip from the staircase window.

What would he not have given to have been seated by the side of his little lady-love, and borne along by a pair of splendid bays through the July sunshine that bathed the whole landscape in its wide, golden radiance?

Little was said by either until they reached a pretty gothic lodge, standing inside a pair of large iron gates, which the groom sprang down to open as an old woman, with a brown wrinkled, weather-beaten face, appeared in the doorway. She dropped a low curtsy to the baronet.

"So, Mrs. Doyle, you haven't given up your post of gate-keeper, I see?" said Sir Jasper, walking the horses slowly through the gates.

"No, sir, and don't intend to for a good many years yet!" she responded, cheerily.

"I still have hopes of seeing the master back at his old home again, though it's so many years since he went away!"

"Does she mean my father?" whispered Haidée, and Sir Jasper nodded assent.

"I am afraid your wish will never be realised."

"I've heard you say so afore, Sir Jasper; but for all that I haven't lost faith," she said, a certain obstinacy latent in her voice.

"I daresay you'll laugh, sir; but it's my firm belief that the curse will be lifted from Mr. Darrell's life, and I shall see him hold up his head once more, as he did so many, many years ago!"

The baronet shrugged his shoulders by way of reply, and touching the horses with his whip, soon reached the top of the neglected, weed-grown approach.

The house was, or rather had been, an extremely pretty one, of white stone, and somewhat fanciful architecture, having a colonnade running its entire length. In the court was a magnificent fountain, with a marble group in the centre, representing Venus rising from a huge shell, but in the place of limpid, flowing water, damp green stains trickled slowly

down, and the basin itself was entirely overgrown with moss. There were extensive gardens which had once been beautifully laid out, and carefully tended, but now they were nothing but tangled labyrinths of weeds, which flourished triumphantly in the place of the delicate flowers that had formerly blossomed out their sweet lives in the summer sunshine. The gravelled walks were covered with moss, and shadowed by the rank growth of trees, whose boughs had been long untouched by gardener or pruning knife—altogether the scene was one of extreme desolation.

"What a lovely place this could be made!" exclaimed Haidée, as Sir Jasper assisted her to descend. "It reminds me of Shelley's description of the garden where his sensitive plant grew."

"What may that be?" he asked, with a smile; and half to herself, half to him, she repeated those lines of the sweetest, most fanciful poet that ever lived:—

"The garden once fair, became cold and foul—
The rose leaves, like flakes of crimson now,
Paved the turf and moss below.
The lilies were drooping, and white, and wan,
Like the head and skin of a dying man.
And Indian plants, of scent and hue,
The sweetest that ever were fed on dew,
Leaf after leaf, day after day,
Were massed into the common clay."

"It is a pity the place has been allowed to fall into this state," Sir Jasper admitted, looking round; "it is some time since I saw it, and in the interval it has gone from bad to worse."

"What could have induced my father to desert such a lovely home!" exclaimed Haidée, involuntarily.

The baronet looked at her for a moment in silence, then said, gravely,—

"A great grief drove him away—such a one as I pray may never touch you with its dark shadow."

The girl was awed in spite of herself, and a feeling of depression stole over her, as Sir Jasper, having obtained the key of the front door, led her through suites of silent deserted rooms, where curtains were closely drawn, and the furniture had a queer ghostlike appearance, shrouded as it was in dusty holland coverings. They paused at last in a small, pretty apartment, that had been her mother's boudoir.

"It makes me feel sad," she said, turning away to hide the tear mist that rose to her blue eyes; "it seems to bring closer the sorrow in my father's life."

"The brightness of your own future shall atone for it."

"How can you foretell such a thing? There is no reason why I should be exempt from suffering, more than other people."

"Yes!"

"But why?"

"Because you have someone to love, care for, and watch over you; to shield you from all the pains and anxieties of life!" he replied, with sudden passion, thinking the time had come when he might declare himself without risk of startling her. "Haidée, darling, haven't you guessed how dear you are to me, and that the one great wish of my heart is to make you my wife?"

He took her hands, and attempted to draw her to him, but she held back, all the sweet red bloom fading from her cheeks, and a grieved amazement in her eyes.

"Is this true, Sir Jasper? I am indeed sorry."

"Sorry, dearest! Why?"

"Because I don't care for you, at least, not—not in that way."

"But you will in time, Haidée. You are young, and I have not known you very long, still I am willing to wait as long as you wish. I will teach you to care for me, never fear!"

There was a sense of power, of assurance, in his voice, that almost frightened the girl, and determined her not to allow herself to be placed in a false position towards him, but to tell him the truth, and let him see the impossibility of his wishes ever being realized.

"No," she said, nervously clasping her fingers together, and looking away from him across the moss-grown terrace, and neglected gardens, "it cannot be, Sir Jasper. There is a reason against it."

"And that is?"

"My love belongs to another."

There was a dead silence. Very seldom, indeed, was Sir Jasper Ruthven taken at a disadvantage, but this declaration of hers certainly surprised him beyond measure. Who could possibly have won her heart in those mountain solitudes where her young life had been spent?

"Do you really mean this as a fact?" he said, at last, hardly able to realize it.

"Certainly!"—with a little air of offended dignity.

"Then you are engaged, I presume?"

She bent her head assentingly, not daring to glance at the baronet, whose stern voice gave her some idea of his anger—but far from a full one. Sir Jasper was a man not accustomed to have his wishes thwarted—one to whom opposition only gave fresh ardour.

"Should I be asking too much if I inquired your lover's name?" he said, quietly.

Haidée hesitated.

"I would rather not mention it if you don't mind."

"As you will," he said, his mind fixing with unerring accuracy on the only single man with whom she had been brought into contact—Philip Greville. "I suppose your father knows nothing of this?"

"Oh! no."

"That was a needless question of mine, for it is with his permission I ventured to present myself as your suitor, and it is his greatest wish that you should become my wife. Haidée, reconsider what you have said—think how happy I would make you, how devoted I would be. Break off this childish engagement, and come to me!"

He spoke ardently, passionately, his persuasive dark eyes burning with fervour, his handsome face bent down until his hot breath fanned her cheek. In good truth he was madly in love, and all his pulses were beating and throbbing under the excitement of the moment—the intoxication of the girl's radiant beauty. She drew back, almost terrified at his vehemence.

"Don't say any more, please, Sir Jasper, it is only paining me and yourself to no purpose. Nothing you can urge will alter my decision, for"—her voice thrilling—"it is not a child's love but a woman's I have given, and as long as I live it can never alter, or be recalled."

Again there was a pause. A very tempest of angry passion was raging in the baronet's heart, until it almost passed beyond his control, strong as that at all times was. He had made so sure of her, he had had such implicit faith in his own powers that the shock of the refusal was doubly bitter, and stung him to the very quick.

Should he give her up—forego this cherished project—crush the passion that had grown and strengthened until now it seemed a part of his nature? No, a thousand times no! By fair means or foul, he must win her!

He came nearer, and laid a heavy hand on her arm.

"Haidée, you force me into a line of conduct that it pains me infinitely to adopt, but I have no alternative. The love I bear you is so strong that it is my master, and I its veriest slave, and marry me you shall! This seems a harsh sort of wooing, and I use a strange tone, you will say. Well, it is justified. I alone of all the world know the secret of your father's life, and for all these years I have kept it most sacredly; but now, unless you consent to my wishes, I swear I will publish it abroad, and on you will rest the blame of condemning him to the scaffold as a murderer!"

Just at first the words fell on Haidée's ears without carrying a full sense of comprehension. Then, as their meaning slowly dawned, she staggered back, a white horror in her

face, her eyes dilated, her hands thrown out as if in appeal.

"It is not true!" she muttered hoarsely—then, casting herself at his feet, "Oh, unsay those cruel words—tell me you have deceived me—anything save that!"

"I have not deceived you, but you would never have known if you had given a different answer to my suit. It is only my love that has forced this assertion from me—"

"Your love!" she interrupted, with bitterest scorn. "It seems to me a strange way of desecrating love's holy name."

"Strange or not, it is the only way left me," he answered, a red flush staining his brow. "I do not suppose your filial affection will allow you to sign your father's death-warrant, but unless you marry me I will go and denounce him, and let justice take its own course."

"And I thought you called him friend!"

"Friendship must yield to passion."

She turned away with a gesture full of scorn and contempt, and throwing herself in an arm-chair near, covered her face with her hands, and did not speak for some moments. Stunned, shocked, horrified, as she undoubtedly was, there was yet something in the baronet's manner that convinced her he spoke truly. She herself had always suspected her father's fits of gloom and despondency to be the result of remorse for some rash act committed in the past, but her greatest fears had never pointed to such a conclusion as this, and the horror of it well-nigh overwhelmed her.

Sir Jasper stood by, moodily watching her. He was man enough to feel some slight degree of shame for what he knew to be an act of black treachery in thus making the father's crime a means of forcing the daughter into a marriage that was hateful to her, but the gratification of his own desires had become so habitual to him that he allowed no scruples of conscience or pity to interfere with them.

At last Haidée raised a miserable white face, and looked at him.

"What proof have I that you do not speak falsely?" she asked in a harsh, strained voice, out of which all the soft, cooing music had fled.

"Appeal to your father for confirmation of my words, and he will not deny their veracity, or stay—I will give you the details, and then you can verify them yourself."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"The man Eustace Darrell murdered was my cousin and predecessor, Sir Charles Ruthven," went on the baronet, finding Haidée made no answer to his words. "The two men had had a quarrel of long standing, and one night they met on the cliffs, just by the village, and your father pushed Sir Charles over into the sea."

"Then it was not a premeditated crime!" cried Haidée. "Thank Heaven for that!"

"No, it was not premeditated; but it was, none the less, murder, and I witnessed the act! I was riding by when I heard loud voices raised in angry altercation, and descended from my horse with the intention of parting the combatants; but before I could reach them Sir Charles had been thrown over the precipice, and was lying on the rocks below—dead!"

Haidée hid her face in her hands, with an irrepressible shudder.

"I was sorry for Darrell, whose remorse was terrible when his passion had had time to cool," continued Sir Jasper, "and so I promised to keep his secret, and prevent the honour of his family—which he prized more than life itself—from being stained with so foul a blot. I kept my word, and it was supposed Sir Charles had met his death accidentally; but, after that, your father was a doomed man. He could never free himself from the remembrance of his crime, and so as to get away from the place where it was committed he left his home, and took you, a baby, away to the North. Now you see why he deserted this place, and the reason of his reclusive life."

Yes, she did see; and a tide of love and pity welled in her heart. She had no blame for her father—only tenderest compassion for the remorse he was doomed to endure in expiation of a crime committed in a moment of passion, and demanding a life's atonement.

"You were pitiful to him," she said, her voice shaken and trembling. "Will you be less so to me?"

"No, for I will ensure your whole life's happiness—but it must be as my wife!"

"Ah, no!" she cried out, seizing his hand. "Be merciful! Take all my father's wealth—everything you will, only leave me free! I cannot give up my love! Oh, Philip, Philip!"

The baronet's face hardened, his lips set themselves together with cruel firmness.

"Let us understand each other," he said, coldly. "I am determined on one of the two courses I have mentioned; and tears, prayers, entreaties—nothing will alter my resolve. You have the initiative in your own hands, and so I only ask you to decide."

Poor Haidée! Her very heart was torn with anguish. She could see no ray of light in the dark path through which she must travel.

To give up Philip was like wrenching soul and body asunder, but did not a higher duty than love force her to renounce him, in order to shield his father from the consequences of his crime, and preserve his dreadful secret?

"I have decided," she said, at last, in cold, dull tones of despair. "I consent to marry you, but there shall be no hypocrisy in my consent; for I tell you that when I plight my troth to you all the best part of me will die on the altar! My heart—my thoughts—my soul itself belongs to another man; and will belong to him till death takes them!"

Late that afternoon, as Philip was ascending the stairs to his own room, he met Haidée, but so changed from the likeness of her former self—so white, wan, and miserable—that he absolutely started back in amazement.

"Haidée—darling, what is the matter?"

"I wanted to see you," she said, not answering his question, and drawing back as if afraid lest he should attempt to caress her. "All the others are in their rooms dressing for dinner, so we can go to the library without any fear of being disturbed."

Wondering still more, he silently followed her downstairs, and when they had entered the room she closed the door, and stood against it, pressing her hand to her heart.

"Do you remember your presentiment last night?" she asked, with a shadowy smile, that was infinitely more pathetic than tears. "Well, it was a true one, Philip. Circumstances have arisen to part us as completely as if death had claimed one or the other, and in the future we must meet as strangers. Do you understand—strangers?"

He stared at her as if he thought her mad, and indeed, to doubt her faith was the very last thing that occurred to him.

"I do not understand," he said slowly; "what can have happened since last night to cause you to speak thus?"

She caught her breath sharply—what had happened she must keep a profound secret from him as well as from the rest of the world, and the problem that now presented itself was what reason she could give in explanation of her conduct, so as to prevent him from trying to find out the real one.

"Haidée, you are playing with me, trifling with me!" he exclaimed, half angrily, as she remained silent; "but what your motive is Heaven alone knows! I cannot guess."

"Do I look like trifling—does this?" holding up her alim white hand, on whose third finger a circlet of diamonds flashed in the late afternoon sunlight—"look like trifling? No, I am in sober earnest, and I called you in here to tell you that all that has passed between us must be forgotten—must be as if it had never been, for—I am now the betrothed wife of Sir Jasper Ruthven."

Philip Greville was no coward. If he had

been a soldier he would ever have been where the battle was fiercest, where danger was greatest; but at these words of Haidée's he turned as white as she herself was, and laid hold of the back of a chair near which he stood as if for support.

"Is this the truth?" he asked harshly, "Heaven's own truth."

"And this is woman's faith!" he groaned, feeling his former troubles dwindling into mere insignificance before this shattering of the bright vision on which all his dreams had been set—towards which all his dreams had tended. "Great Heavens! if an angel had come down from above and foretold such treachery I would have given him the lie—I would have said it was impossible!" He took two steps forward, and put his hands on her shoulders so as to look into her averted face. "Was the test of my poverty too great for you?—was it Sir Jasper's wealth and position that tempted you?"

"Yes!" she said, almost with a sigh of relief at the suggestion, which was one that had not presented itself to her before.

He pushed her from him roughly, almost violently.

"And you did not even think it worth while being off with the old love before you were on with the new? Well, I congratulate you as much on your powers of dissimulation as I despise my own blindness in trusting you so completely. Instead of the innocent, pure, unworldly creature I deemed you, you are the most accomplished coquette on Heaven's wide earth!"

Haidée said nothing, but her pale lips quivered, and it seemed to her that if someone had driven a knife into her heart the pain would have been less keen, less intense, than that her lover's accusations gave. And yet, she told herself, it was better he should believe her false and treacherous—the agony of parting would surely not be so great if he were assured of her unworthiness.

A minute later and Philip was at her feet. "Haidée! this is some horrible dream—some dreadful mistake! I will not believe your own testimony. I know, in spite of everything, you are sweet and true. Oh! darling, why have you said these things to me?" he cried, a sudden revulsion of feeling overcoming him at the sight of her sad white face.

She dared not trust herself to look at him; if she had done so her fortitude would have deserted her, and the remembrance of her father, Sir Jasper, and duty would have been swept away.

Making a violent effort she wrenched herself from his clasp, and was gone, while Philip stayed in the library, vainly trying to find the key to the enigma of her conduct.

One minute he believed her own testimony, namely, that the desire of being mistress of Heathcliff Priors had made her false to him; the next he vehemently negated it, and told himself there must be some cause for her desertion that he did not know of—some secret which she was hiding from him.

CHAPTER XIX.

Haidée's engagement to Sir Jasper was immediately made public, and the young girl received a letter from her father giving his entire approval, and commanding her obedience.

As there seemed no reason for its postponement, and the baronet was very anxious to have the wedding as soon as possible, it was arranged it should take place at Heathcliff in about six weeks' time; consequently it became necessary to see after the trousseau without delay.

Sybil undertook its management, and it was at once put in hand, the house as a natural sequence being thrown into a state of constant excitement with the arrival of parcels, dress-makers, milliners, and the various etoiles incident to a ceremony that was to be the talk of the whole county.

Sir Jasper was undoubtedly very proud of his young fiancée, and tried to show his fondness by lavishing on her presents of the most splendid description, all of which she received with a cold sort of gratitude that was hardly more satisfactory than absolute indifference.

A great change had come over Haidée. From a bright, riant girl, with the soft bloom of a wild rose on her delicate cheeks, and the laughter and enthusiasm of eighteen in her blue eyes, she had grown chill, reserved, and self-contained as a Greek statue, and looked at least three years older than when she had first come to Heathcliff.

"Are you made of stone?" Sir Jasper asked her one day when he had brought her a magnificent parure of sapphires, whose azure radiance might have flashed above the brows of an empress, but which she put aside with a few slight words of thanks.

She glanced up quickly. "I sometimes think my heart is turned to stone," she answered, involuntarily, and he rose from his chair and gazed through the window.

"I wish Pygmalion had made known the secret by which he warmed Galatea into life," he exclaimed, at length, with attempted playfulness, as he came to her side, and placed his hand on the golden wealth of her sunny hair.

"Is there no spell by which I can win your love—no charm to force you to care for me?"

"Love ceases to be love when it is forced," she said, sententiously, and with a curious backward movement, as though shrinking from his touch.

"Give me some task to perform whereby I may prove how dear you are to me. Ask me some difficult thing, and no matter what it cost you, wish shall be gratified."

Haidée hesitated for a few minutes, her head bent; when she raised it he saw a flood of crimson had mounted from throat to brow.

"I will ask you a favour. Will you make some excuse for sending Mr. Greville from here? I—I think it would be better for us both."

It cost a desperate effort to make the request, but having done so she breathed more freely, though all the while there was a strange dull pain at her heart, for she knew the mere sense of being under the same roof as Philip was in itself a delight, and that when he had gone life would be even more terrible than it was now.

Still, it would be, as she had said, better for him to be away, both for his own sake and the sake of her promises.

Haidée was not one of those resolute women who are capable of sustained effort, and who may always be trusted to keep their feelings under control.

She could not, like Muriel, mark out a path for herself, and follow it straight on to the end, crushing with a firm hand all obstacles that came in her way.

Under the influence of duty, and for the sake of her father, she had given up her lover; but the enormity of the sacrifice was ever present to her, and sometimes the mere sight of Philip, the tones of his voice, the echo of his footsteps, were sufficient to drown the remembrance of everything else, and the longing to cast herself on his breast, and justify herself by proving she was not deliberately false, became almost greater than she could bear. It was for this reason she wished his departure.

The baronet did not answer for some minutes. The idea of getting rid of Greville had suggested itself many times; but there was a reason against it he could not tell her.

"I will do my best," he said, presently, a dark frown knitting his brows closely together; "but I must not dismiss this artist too summarily, or I shall have people suspecting the humiliating truth of your affection for him."

He turned away as he spoke, and hastily left the room, for, however stoical a man may be, it is a very severe blow to his vanity to be reminded that the love he covets is withheld from him and lavished without measure on a

rival, who, in everything save personal qualifications, is immeasurably his inferior.

The baronet went to his study, where he seated himself in front of the writing-table, and remained lost in gloomy meditation, until the entrance of a footman with the post-bag disturbed him.

Then he roused himself and glanced carelessly over the superscriptions of the letters until a rather legal-looking one, addressed to Philip caught his eye, and he examined it closely, as if it interested him.

After a few minutes' thought, he took a pen-knife, and carefully removed the seal, and then, ringing for some hot water, placed the envelope over it, and was thus enabled to open it without injury to the paper.

The letter was from Pierson, and its contents ran as follows:

"MY DEAR GREVILLE, I have just received your letter. According to promise, although rather later than I intended, I write to give you some account of your host's youth, and leave it to you to judge whether the few details I am enabled to offer tend to throw any light on the disappearance of your letters."

"Sir Jasper Ruthven was the son of a younger brother of Sir Edgar Mathewson, but, owing to his mother's death, and his father's second marriage, he spent the chief part of his time at Heathcliff Priors with his uncle and cousin—the latter, who was heir to the baronetcy, being a few years older than himself. When about twenty, Sir Jasper came to London, and from what I learn, plunged into all kinds of dissipation. He was reputed to be an adept at billiards, an inveterate card-player, and fond of racing and betting, and, naturally enough, he fell into pecuniary difficulties, from which however, he seems to have been rescued by a legacy from his uncle, Sir Edgar, on whose death he returned to Heathcliff Priors, of which his cousin was now master."

"A very short time after his arrival a sad accident happened—Sir Charles Ruthven fell over the cliffs close by the house and was drowned; consequently the title and estates descended to the present baronet, whose two predecessors had died within a fortnight of each other. You may—and probably will—think this sketch a very slight one; nevertheless, it is not without significance, for it proves that Sir Jasper's reputation in his younger years was far from stainless, and points to the conclusion that he would not scruple to perform a dishonourable action if it suited his purpose to do so. Now, I believe it was he who took your papers, and, granting this hypothesis, there remains the certainty that he must have had a motive for wishing to get them in his possession—that motive probably has to do with the secret of your birth."

"With regard to Grace Seaforth, I have had a man staying in the village of Heathcliff for the purpose of making inquiries relative to her flight; but it took place so many years ago that it is a matter of great difficulty to obtain any authentic information. It is, however, admitted by all who remember her that she was very beautiful, and much superior to her station, and it is believed that the person she eloped with was a gentleman. I also found that Sir Jasper Ruthven was supposed to have advised her very much, and on comparing dates, discovered that he left Heathcliff just before her elopement, and returned about the time of her death. Do you see to what conclusion this coincidence points—namely, that, granting Grace Seaforth to have been your mother, Sir Jasper Ruthven is the man with whom she went away, and who is therefore your father? Of course, after all this reasoning may be false, and the whole thing turn out widely different; nevertheless, I must acknowledge very little doubt remains in my own mind as to the correctness of my surmise."

"However, I still advise you to keep silence as yet, and wait till Matthew Seaforth returns before taking any decisive step; I have had a letter from him, and, according to present

arrangements, if nothing unforeseen happens, he will be in England in a fortnight's time. Directly he comes I will write to you, so that you may lose no time in meeting him. After that we shall know better how to proceed. Believe me, my dear Greville, yours very truly,
"ROBERT PIERSON."

The letter dropped from Sir Jasper's nerveless hand, and fell to the floor unheeded, while he remained staring straight before him, and evidently much agitated.

"It is worse than I imagined. His suspicions have led him to action!" he muttered at last, while great drops of moisture started from his brow. "And so, after all these years, the secret will come to light! It is fatal!"

His head fell forward on his chest; but a few minutes later he started up, and pouring out a glass of brandy from a spirit stand on a side table, drank it undisturbed. It seemed to restore his self-command in a degree, for his eyes grew brighter, and his expression firmer. He picked up the letter and read it again, carefully weighing every syllable.

"Confound it!" he said to himself; "after all, he only suspects, he cannot prove anything, and I must hit some plan for deceiving this lawyer, despite his shrewdness. So Matthew Gosforth is coming back. Well, I don't think I need fear him. I can manage Philip Greville. What could he ever see in me here, I wonder? I cannot comply with your request and turn him out, my fair Haidée, for that would mean stating him off to Mr. Robert Pierson, and the ensuing complications that I am anxious to prevent. No, he must remain where he is for the present, and I must examine all letters that come to the house, and take care Pierson's next falls into my hands first. Till he writes I have nothing to fear, and when he does I shall know better what course to pursue."

He struck a wax match, and, deliberately setting fire to the barrister's communication, watched it burning till nothing remained but a blackened morsel of tinder that dropped from his fingers to the carpet.

"If inquiries are made it will be easy enough to lay the blame on the Post Office authorities," he muttered, smiling grimly, and then he sat down to ponder over the situation that he instinctively felt demanded all his powers of boldness, to grapple with successfully.

CHAPTER XX.

On late Lady Urwicke had not been very well, and for the last two days had stayed in her own room instead of joining the circle downstairs. There was nothing specific the matter with her, she said, when inquiries were made; she only felt weak and languid—an effect she attributed to the hot weather.

"How is Lady Urwicke?" asked Philip one evening of Sybil Ruthven, who he passed in the passage outside the Viscountess's apartments. She had her hand filled with flowers—roses, heliotrope, jessamine, and carnations. "I am just going to inquire," she answered, "and to take her my bouquet. Isn't it pretty?"

"Very!"

"I gathered the flowers myself, and see what a thorn has done for me," holding up her white hand, on which was a long, ugly scratch, with the blood trickling from it.

"Let me bind it up," said Philip. "Have you a handkerchief?"

She drew one from her pocket, and as she did so a curious cut glass phial, engraved with Eastern characters, fell from its folds on the carpet.

Greville bent to pick it up, but before restoring it to her looked at it with some interest.

"Is it not quaint?" said Sybil, putting it in her pocket rather hastily. "It was brought me from Persia filled with attar of roses, but I have not used the perfume, for it scents my handkerchiefs enough by lying in the box with them. I suppose the essence escapes through

the stopper. Thank you"—as Greville tied the linen round her hand—"I must be more careful when I gather roses in future."

"Lady Urwicke is fond of flowers," he observed.

"Passionately. She likes them in her bedroom, so I take them to her every evening now that she doesn't come downstairs to gather them for herself."

She opened the door as she spoke, and disappeared within, while Philip took his way to the village to spend an hour or two with the doctor, between whom and himself a sort of intimacy had sprung up, and in whose society he endeavoured to lighten the tedious and monotony of his lonely evenings.

He was undoubtedly very miserable. He would have thrown up his employment and left Heathcliff altogether, if it had not been for some lingering hope that by staying he had a chance of elucidating the mystery surrounding Haidée's conduct; for the pale watchfulness of her face, whenever he caught a glimpse of her, was quite sufficient to assure him love had nothing to do with her pretence to Sir Jasper, and—perhaps unconsciously to himself—had counted on the possibility of her return to her allegiance.

More than the time specified by Pierson had elapsed without bringing a letter from him, but the omission caused Philip no anxiety—hardly, indeed, did he think of it at all, for in the great sorrow of losing the girl he loved lesser ones were merged, and the vivid zest with which he had formerly pursued any clue likely to lead him to a knowledge of who and what his parents were had now changed into actual indifference.

The morning following his colloquy with Sybil Lady Urwicke's maid came with a message from her mistress to the effect that she wished to see him for a few minutes; and, somewhat surprised, Philip proceeded to the boudoir, where he found Muriel lying back in a lounging chair, with an Indian shawl wrapped round her, although the morning was hot enough to have been called sultry.

He started back in astonishment as he saw the change these last few days had wrought in her.

Her face was perfectly colourless, save for faint blue shadows round the mouth and eyes, and there was in her pose and manner the lassitude of one who has reached the last degree of weakness.

"What is the matter?" she asked, with a wan smile, as she gave him her hand. "Are you alarmed at my summons?"

"No, but I am at your appearance," he answered, truthfully. "Surely, Lady Urwicke, you must be very ill."

"Not absolutely ill—only weak, I think. Oh, I daresay I shall be all right in a few days."

Philip looked doubtful.

"Have you seen a doctor?"

"Oh, no! I did not think it worth while. I am not at all desirous of making myself out an invalid when there is no necessity for it."

He did not reply, but he thought indignantly enough that it was her husband's place to have seen she had medical advice. Surely a man with any love for his wife would have done so!

"But I did not call you in to talk of myself," continued Muriel, rising to a sitting posture. "It was of Miss Darrell I wished to speak. Don't think I am interfering on a subject which I know must be painful to you," she added, earnestly, as the young man made a half-shrinking backward movement. "If I did not take a very sincere interest in the welfare both of Haidée and yourself, I would not attempt anything of the sort; but some time ago she told me she was secretly engaged to you, and two days afterwards her formal betrothal to Sir Jasper Ruthven was announced. Since then she has pointedly avoided me, and, much as I have tried, I have never been able to get even a few minutes' conversation with her alone. Still, I have watched her, and it is easy to see she is very unhappy. I am sure she does

not care for Sir Jasper, and so I thought perhaps you and she might have had some misunderstanding, and that she had accepted him in a fit of pique. If this is the case let me entreat you to go to her and make your peace before it is too late—save her, above all, from a loveless union!"

Her voice vibrated with intensity, and she leaned forward, clasping together her thin, almost transparent hands, in which the blue network of veins was distinctly visible. She liked Haidée too well not to make an effort to deliver her from the risk of such an unhappy lot as her own!

"You have not misunderstood me," she added, waiting for him to reply. "You believe it is my affection for Haidée that has induced me to speak?"

"I believe you are incapable of doing anything but what is good and kind," he answered, fervently, raising her hand to his lips. "I only wish it were as you supposed, so that I might have a chance of winning Haidée back. But it is not so; we have had no shadow of a quarrel; and the reason she became affianced to Sir Jasper I am as ignorant of as you yourself."

And then he told her all there was to tell of how their engagement had been broken off.

"I am assured of one thing—namely, that pressure has been brought to bear on her," said Muriel, with conviction. "She would never have acted so treacherously if left to her own free will."

"That is what I have said to myself over and over again, but it is no use for me to try and obtain a further explanation. She keeps carefully out of my way, and has taken no notice whatever of a note I contrived to get conveyed to her."

Lady Urwicke thought for a few minutes before speaking again.

"I am placed in an awkward position," she observed, at length. "You see, as long as I share Sir Jasper's hospitality, it is very difficult for me to say anything in the matter, and yet I am so anxious to assure Haidée's happiness that I will make another effort to discover her real feelings, and let you know the result. Will you come in and see me again to-morrow at about this time?"

He answered in the affirmative, and was about taking leave, when a sudden spasm contracted Muriel's features, and she fell back in her chair, pressing her hands against her chest; and evidently in a paroxysm of pain. A violent fit of coughing shook her, and a slight froth rose to her lips.

Seriously alarmed, Philip rushed to a canteen, and poured out a glass of water, and then was about ringing the bell, but stopped as she made a motion of negation.

"It is over. I am better now," she said, presently, after drinking the water. "I am afraid I frightened you"—trying to smile.

"You have convinced me you are much more seriously ill than you yourself believe," he responded, very gravely. "Has not Lord Urwicke suggested your consulting a physician?"

"Lord Urwicke!" she repeated, with a fine smile, that was half pain—half contempt. "No, he has not professed any anxiety on my account."

The admission was given involuntarily, and as she might she could not prevent the bitterness from making itself felt in her voice. Claid had not even been near her, for his anger and disgust at her supposed assignation with the artist had not cooled in the least; but she, not knowing this, attributed his neglect to a very different motive, more especially as she watched him every morning start for the Towers, and saw how frequently Sybil Ruthven accompanied him.

Philip dared not say more, but his heart ached with a compassion that could not have been deeper had she been his own sister, for the sad lot to which she had been doomed by her father's ambition.

He left her, however, with the resolve that he himself would speak to Lord Urwicke, and



["IT IS WORSE THAN I IMAGINED;" MUTTERED SIR JASPER, "HIS SUSPICIONS HAVE LED HIM TO ACTION."]

it happened the chance was given at once; for hardly had he closed the door of Muriel's boudoir when the Viscount, who was coming out of his own dressing-room, saw him, and stopped, waiting for him to advance.

"I was on the point of seeking you, Lord Urwicke."

"Indeed!" said the Viscount, incredulously, the heavy frown not lifting from his brow.

"I have just left your wife—"

"So it seems," interrupted Claud. "May I ask what occasioned your visit to her?"

Philip looked embarrassed—in good truth, he hardly knew how to answer the question, and his hesitation was not lost on the Viscount, who naturally put his own construction on it.

"I will not press for a reply, that I see you are unprepared to give," he observed, sternly; "at the same time, let me impress upon you my desire that your visit should not be repeated. I do not choose for my wife to receive guests who are not my friends."

Greville flushed at the insolence of the tone, which however, for Muriel's sake, he would not resent. He imagined it was owing to his subordinate position Lord Urwicke forbade a friendship between himself and the Viscount—that jealousy had anything to do with it never for a moment occurred to him.

"I was about telling you that Lady Urwicke is really ill, and something should be done for her without delay," he said, in a voice of at least equal hauteur. "Probably you will say I have no right to interfere in such a matter."

"I do say it!" curtly, "and you must excuse my declining to listen to you."

With which remark the Viscount passed on, and entered his wife's boudoir; but if he had meditated an angry remonstrance for her indiscretion in permitting Philip's presence, all thought of it vanished when he saw her, and he was only conscious of shocked surprise at her changed appearance—even more ghastly now than when the artist had come in, for the

sharp fit of pain had left her paler and more exhausted than ever.

"Why didn't you let me know you were ill?" he asked, seating himself near her.

"I did not imagine the news would be at all likely to interest you, and, besides, your time and attention have been taken up with more important matters."

"At any rate, you haven't given me a chance of proving it!" he rejoined, angrily. "I suppose you did not fear Mr. Greville being equally indifferent, otherwise you would hardly have consulted him on the subject."

She flashed a rapid glance of indignation from beneath her lowered lids.

"It would certainly never have occurred to me to make him my confidant with regard to my health."

"Why was he here then?"

"That I must decline telling you."

"As you will. But you are aware your refusal is as much an answer as anything verbal would be. I have not been blind to your penchant for this young man; but I had determined to say nothing about it to you till after we left Heathcliff, in order to avoid public scandal. Unfortunately your imprudence forces me to break my resolve, and what I have already said to him I repeat to you—I will not allow you to receive his visits on any pretext whatever."

Lady Urwicke's lip curled contemptuously. "It is very few restrictions I place upon you," continued Claud, seeing in her silence only an disinclination to allow herself to be deprived of the artist's society; "but this one I make a point of having obeyed."

"And suppose I refuse?" her spirit rising rebelliously at his masterful tone.

"Then I must remind you that whatever our private relations may be, in the eyes of the law I am your husband, and, as such, have a right to exert some authority over you."

She turned away her head without replying, and in this position her profile was towards

him, and he could see the curious sharpness with which the features were defined, and the dark hollows in the cheek.

In spite of all, a strange yearning rose in his heart to take the slight figure in his arms, and tell her how dear she had grown to him.

He mastered the inclination with an impatient sigh, but his voice was very gentle as he said,—

"Although I feel it was necessary, I am sorry I have had to speak harshly to you, Muriel. Your appearance certainly should inspire the reverse of severity. You were wrong in not letting me know your indisposition was so serious."

"It is not serious," she persisted, morbidly anxious to avoid the charge of attempting to provoke sympathy. "As a rule I suffer no pain, and I shall be quite well in a few days."

Lord Urwicke shook his head.

"I am driving to the Towers this morning, and on my way I will call in the village, and send Clifford to see you, and then we shall hear what he has to say."

"Is Miss Ruthven going with you?" asked Muriel, abruptly.

"Yes," he responded, in slight embarrassment. "There was some question about the decoration of your rooms, and she said she thought she knew your taste well enough to decide it."

He did not add that it had been at Sybil's own suggestion he had arranged to take her, or that if his own wishes were consulted he would rather go alone.

"Pray do not let me detain you!" exclaimed Muriel, taking up a volume, and beginning to read; and, thus summarily dismissed, the Viscount left the room, while after his departure the book dropped from his wife's listless fingers, and great tears of wounded love, pride, and bitterest mortification made their way slowly down her pallid cheeks.

(To be continued.)



["LORD STRONGLEIGH IS HERE," CRIED A VOICE, AND HER HUSBAND STEPPED FORWARD AND CONFRONTED THE INTRUDER.]

NOVELLETTE I

A USELESS SACRIFICE.

—O—

CHAPTER I.

THE LEIGHTON GIRLS.

"I TELL you what it is, girls, I'm not going to stand this kind of thing any longer!"

"What kind of thing?" asked Blanche Leighton, one of the two girls thus addressed.

"Why, this condition of genteel poverty," returned Alice, bitterly. "Here are we three girls, well-born and well-bred, obliged to look twice at every sixpence before we spend it, and compelled to make our own dresses if we go to garden-parties or balls, or any social entertainment whatever. I am perfectly sick of it!"

"Well, so am I," drawled Julie, as she allowed the sewing on which she was engaged to fall upon her lap, while she leaned back in her chair and half suppressed a yawn. "The question is—what are we to do? Papa gives us as much as he can possibly afford, and we have just the choice of staying at home altogether, or making up inexpensive and pretty clothes for ourselves in order to go to all the balls and garden-parties, flower-shows, and pic-nics to which we are invited. For my own part, I prefer working as we are doing, and having as much enjoyment as I can get, to playing the part of Cinderella, without the prospect of a handsome prince coming to my rescue."

"That goes without saying," retorted Alice, sharply, "and I quite admit that papa gives us as much money as he can spare, and more than he can really afford. We can't expect any improvement in our condition from him, and, therefore, we must help ourselves."

"But how?" asked Blanche.

"We must get married!"

Her sisters shrugged their shoulders, and Julie, who was often unpleasantly outspoken, now asked, sarcastically,—

"Hasn't it been the one object of our lives to get married? and do we seem to be any nearer the accomplishment of our purpose now than when we left school? You know as well as I do, Alice, that the only men who have shown the least desire to marry any of us have either been very nice and very poor, or if they had money they were simply horrid."

"Beggars can't afford to be fastidious," said Alice, resolutely, "and it is the duty of girls in our circumstances to marry the first wealthy man that asks them. As for being 'horrid,' as you express it, Julie, every man will seem horrid against whom one takes a prejudice."

"Which means that you think I ought to have accepted old Lord Rawson!" exclaimed Julie, angrily.

"I should have done so had I been you," was the quiet response.

"Then I'm sorry you hadn't the chance!" was the indignant retort. "I have more self-respect than to sell myself to a wicked old man for the sake of his money. His first wife died of a broken heart."

"Julie, how can you make such an assertion!" exclaimed Alice, angrily; "Lady Rawson died of a rapid decline."

"The doctors called it 'rapid decline,' asserted Julie, "but other people called it a broken heart, and I fancy they knew best."

"Bah! People don't die of broken hearts except in novels," sneered Alice; "but it is useless talking to you, Julie. I know you are sure to marry a man without a sixpence in his pocket, or a second coat to his back."

"Thank you, sis. I daresay I shall do as well as you in the long run," said Julie, with a smile. "I mean to love my husband when I have one, whatever may be the number of his sixpences, or his coats; but what rash act are you contemplating? You've got something in your head, I'm sure."

"Indeed, I wish I had," was the answer

"but at present I have nothing more definite in my mind than a burning desire for a change of some sort or other. Things cannot be worse with us girls than they are, and everything in connection with us might very well be better."

"I am afraid that things might very well be worse," here Blanche observed, gravely. "Suppose papa were to die, what would become of us then?"

"I shouldn't like to suppose anything of the kind," said Alice, with a shiver.

She had noticed only this very morning how pale and harassed her father looked, and her sister's words seemed ominous.

The bare suggestion, however, that she and her sisters might one day lose their only surviving parent only added to her determination to make her own position well assured without any unnecessary loss of time, and she resumed her sewing with the feeling that the garment upon which she was at work would help her to the end she had in view.

Very clever with scissors and needles and sewing-machine were Alice, Blanche, and Julie Leighton, and had they been born in a different rank of life they would, without doubt, have made very good incomes as milliners and dressmakers.

Being, however, the daughters of a retired colonel, and the great granddaughters of a peer, the idea of working for others, or of making money by their own exertions, never entered their heads; and instead of being grateful for the talents they possessed they grumbled unceasingly at being obliged to exert them.

But it was wonderful to see how these girls dressed upon the small sum which their father allowed them for the purpose.

There was always something quaint about their attire, and yet their costumes were never unfashionable; and they had at the same time such perfect tastes with regard to details, and such a quick eye for the artistic combination of colours, that women who had spent as many

pounds over their own dresses as the Leightons had expended shillings over theirs often had good cause to envy the appearance of the latter.

They are preparing now for a garden-party at Ellesmere House, the country-seat of Lord Ellesmere—whose estate is the largest in the county of Sandhshire.

Lady Ellesmere is a pretty, good-natured little woman; fond of having plenty of nice girls at her entertainments, and always particularly kind to the Leightons, whom she openly admires and secretly pities.

She knows that it is a sad thing for fatherless girls in their position to be like her motherless, and she makes a point of going over to her way at any time to afford them pleasure.

Alice knows this, and appreciates the good feeling that prompts the many acts of spontaneous courtesy; and she feels, no doubt, that Lady Ellesmere will help her to a rich husband, if it is ever in her power to do so.

The girls worked on in silence for a time after Blanche's remarks; each was busy with her own thoughts, and they were all of them somewhat pressed for time for the elaborate costumes now worn by girls cannot be dressed together, neither can they be knocked up in a few hours; and let the Leightons be so driven for time they would not sit at work in the afternoon, when people might call upon them.

Unlike most sisters the Leighton girls never dressed alike.

"We don't want to be known among our friends as 'the graces,'" Alice had once said positively, when it was suggested to her that it would be more economical for her and her sisters to have similar garments; "and as we are not a bit like each other it would be absurd to try to make ourselves seem so!"

To her sisters, however, she remarked, confidentially,—

"We have each a style of our own, and our object should be to cultivate it—for style and manner are really more than beauty in the opinion of most people."

She glanced at her own reflection in the glass as she thus spoke.

Of the three she was decidedly the least good-looking, but the shape of her face was a beautiful oval; her eyebrows were straight and delicately pencilled, and her wavy, curly hair, almost black in colour, was pinned upon her head in a manner peculiarly her own, reminding one of the beauties of the time of Charles the Second.

In dress, too, she recalled to mind the portraits of some of the ladies at the Court of the merry monarch; and though the style suited her admirably, there were few women of her acquaintance who would have dared to copy it.

Blanche was a blonde; her eyes were blue as summer skies, and her hair were almost as bright as the golden laburnum; her complexion, too, was clear and dazzling, and she was, without doubt, a very beautiful girl.

Julie was neither dark nor fair, but she had a face that in profile was of a pure Greek type. There was the long, straight nose—the broad, low forehead—the well-curved, full, and voluptuous lips; and the firm, almost heavy, chin, that showed both strength and decision of character.

Thus it will be seen that the three sisters were all of them more than good looking, and possessed some striking points to distinguish them from each other.

"There, I have finished this gown at last!" sighed Alice, as she leaned back in her chair and surveyed the article in question. "Now, what do you think of it, girls?"

"I think that I shouldn't like to wear it," replied Blanche, surveying the fanciful garment, with its puffed sleeves and gathered bodice; "a girl with anything like a decent figure would look a fright in it."

Blanche herself was made on a large pattern, with broad shoulders, full bust and a tapering though by no means slender waist; while Alice, though much more slightly built and far more

graceful, had none of the fine bold curves in her form which were to be seen in her sister.

"The gown will look very well on Alice," remarked Julie, thoughtfully; "those loose baggy things always do; and now what do you think of my dress—is it nearly finished?"

"It is simply hideous!" replied Blanche. "I can't endure that terra-cotta colour; there isn't one woman in a hundred whom it suits."

"Then I shall be the bright exception," laughed Julie, "for with all due to perfection, and it isn't too much to say that pale blue that you are making. But there is papa's foot-step in the garden, and luncheon will be on the table in a few minutes, so we must put away our sewing for to-day. I shall finish my work easily to-morrow morning."

There was a good deal of hurry and bustle for the next few minutes, things had to be folded up and put away, and sundry trifling touches had to be given by each girl to her toilette; for although Lord Leighton and his three daughters lived in furnished lodgings, and the girls had their sitting in their bed-room, so that the little dressing-room might be kept tidy for the reception of visitors. They were always scrupulously careful to have the table laid with silver and glass and flowers, and appear at it as though they lived in good style, with butler and footman at command, instead of having only the landlady's slipshod daughters to wait upon them.

The father of these three handsome girls came into the dining room where they had assembled, and took his seat at the head of the table.

He was tall and thin and still handsome, though his whiskers and moustache were almost white; but there was a sadness and depression about him more particularly observable of late. He seemed indeed like a soldier who had fought well in the battle of life, but to whom the never-ceasing struggle had become too wearisome to be much longer continued.

The girls tried to seem in good spirits and to talk cheerfully, and at length they succeeded in bringing a smile to their father's face, and in making him forget, for a time at least, the anxiety that oppressed him.

But he ate little, and when the meal was over he went out into the garden, lighted a cigar, and sat down in the rude summer house to meditate, or, more correctly speaking, to brood over the ruin that threatened him.

Here Alice found him, and she saw by the slight start which her presence caused, and by the painful attempt to look unconcerned, that her father was trying to hide the gloom that oppressed him.

She was not to be daunted, however, and she sat down by his side, and, taking possession of one of his withered hands, she said, earnestly,—

"Something more than usual is troubling you, papa. Can we girls help you in any way?"

"No, my dear, it is on account of you girls that I am troubled," was the answer, slowly uttered, and with a sigh. "For myself it matters little, my day is nearly done."

"Poor, dear father, don't talk like that. Tell me what is troubling you; two heads are often better than one, and you know the fable of the mouse and the lion. Perhaps I shall be as clever as the mouse."

"You cannot help me, my dear; no one could help me unless they could induce a certain man not to throw a public company in which he and I hold shares into Chancery. If he does so the whole affair will collapse and I shall be ruined."

"But if the man holds shares in it won't he also lose his money?" asked Alice, anxiously.

"Yes, but the loss to him will not be so serious as it is to me—he can afford to lose it. If he would only have a little patience the thing would pay splendidly; and all would be flourishing."

Alice knew too little of business of any description to understand exactly what her father meant; but her heart sank with appre-

hension, for she felt convinced that the affair must be bad at the core which could be ruined by the action of any one shareholder.

She ventured to hint something of the kind to her father, but he rather angrily silenced the objection. He had no doubt whatever as to the soundness of the company, and when the girl inquired the name of the man who had threatened to work such mischief, he replied,—

"It is Lord Strongleigh of Hadden. I don't think you know him."

"Lord Strongleigh!" repeated Alice, with sudden animation. "I know him by reputation, though I have never met. He is expected at Ellesmere to-morrow, and is to stay there on a visit for a week. Will it be of any use for us to call on his acquaintance? Do you think you could convince him of the folly of his proceedings if you were upon friendly terms?"

"It is not probable, my dear, and from all I have heard of him I don't think he is a nice man to know. The case is past your meaning, my child, though I fear you and your sisters will bitterly feel the consequences."

"Shall we be poorer than we are now?" asked Alice, faintly.

"We shall have next to nothing," was the answer. "I have invested the little money I had in risky speculations for the sake of high interest, while there was always the chance of success; and I have been so anxious to make some provision for you girls that I have not always exercised my usual judgment; but it is too late to lament over what cannot be recalled."

Then he began to make excuses for his own want of prudence, but his daughter scarcely heard him; her thoughts had gone off into an entirely different channel, and she was recalling to her mind some of the stories which she had heard about Lord Strongleigh.

He was a widower, she knew, and malicious people said that he had helped to hasten the death of his wife that he might be free to marry a girl whom he ultimately deserted, after having seriously compromised her.

Still, these stories were not believed by everybody, and the Ellesmeres were among the warmest of Lord Strongleigh's friends.

"I should have my lady's good word if that were worth anything," she mused; "and if I am to marry a man for his money, I might as well take him as any other."

So ran her thoughts, but she gave no hint of them to her father. To him she only spoke hopefully of the future, and expressed her belief that he would be Lord Leighton before he died, as his childless cousin could certainly not live very much longer.

He tried to smile, but he did not profess to share her anticipations.

His cousin was hale and hearty, and might take unto himself a second wife, and while he lived no help of any kind could be hoped for from him.

The bare suggestion, however, that the wealth for which he had so long waited might soon be his drove the phantom of impending ruin from his side, for the time at least, and his mind wandered off to the much more pleasant occupation of thinking what he would do when he had plenty of money at his command.

Seeing that he was a little more cheerful, Alice left him.

She had said that her father's cousin could not live much longer; but though he was a very old man she had no real expectation of his death.

Ever since she could remember the certainty that Lord Leighton would soon die, and then their monetary difficulties would be over, had been spoken of in the girl's hearing, until she also had grown to speak of it as certain, but had ceased to count upon it as an event likely to take place in her father's lifetime.

"We girls must help ourselves," she said, decisively, when she was at length alone; "and if we help ourselves we shall be in a

better position to help papa, and as I am the eldest I must set the example."

Then she went to look at and put certain extra touches to the costume she meant to wear on the succeeding day, as though she thought success in her purpose depended upon the skilful arrangement of a ribbon or a flower.

CHAPTER II.

"I am going to introduce you to a charming girl," said Lady Ellesmere the day succeeding that on which the Leighton girls were finishing their gowns.

"I don't care for charming girls," replied Lord Strongleigh, with a glance of admiration at his fair companion. "Though, by the way, who is that elegant girl over there? She is remarkably graceful!"

Lady Ellesmere smiled as she answered,—"That is Alice Leighton, the charming girl of whom I spoke."

"Then I beg to withdraw my assertion—a charming girl who can look like that must be worth knowing! Pray carry out your first intention!"

His hostess, who was sweetly amiable, rallied him a little on his fastidiousness, then took him over to where Colonel Leighton's eldest daughter was standing, chatting to some friends.

The introduction was made, and Alice felt her heart throb with a new sensation.

It was not love, nor was it simple ambition; but there was a certain amount of exultation in the feeling for a conviction that success was within her grasp, came to her as she met Lord Strongleigh's clear, cold blue eyes.

His lordship talked pleasantly, and though there was not much in what he said, he kept close to Alice, and devoted himself exclusively to her in a manner which could not fail to be remarked by everybody present.

But this was Lord Strongleigh's way of amusing himself; if a girl pleased him, he made her conspicuous by his attentions, and when he wearied of her he was equally marked in his indifference, quite regardless of the injury his admiration might have caused, or the pain he inflicted by his neglect.

Alice had heard of this trait in his lordship's character, and therefore she did not attach as much importance to his seeming devotion as she otherwise would have done; but, for all that, when Willie Stone, the nephew of the rector of Bitcham, who had long admired her, bowed, and would have sought her side, she merely returned his salutation, and then seemed to be absorbed in Lord Strongleigh's by no means intellectual conversation. And, yet, in her heart, Alice Leighton loved the tall, broad-shouldered, long-bearded young cantab as she could never love his titled rival; but Willie Stone was dependent upon his own exertions for anything over and above his fellowship of two hundred a-year, which he would lose on marrying, while Lord Strongleigh was supposed to possess an income of between forty and fifty thousand pounds, besides two or three of the stateliest homes in England.

"It would be nothing but the same old tale of grinding poverty," thought Alice, bitterly; "and I know from sad experience that poverty is only romantic when seen from afar. I don't care to go in for the prose of love in a cottage, so I may as well let Willie see that at once; it's a pity, though, we should have got on so well together."

She breathed a little sigh like the wail of the wind over the grave of her love; but she told herself she could not spare time to be sentimental, so she chatted gaily to Lord Strongleigh, and quite fascinated him by her quaint, original remarks, and her winning ways.

Later in the day she must have felt a twinge of pain when she saw Willie paying marked attentions to Miss Silvertown, better known to her friends, on account of her horsey, and somewhat masculine proclivities, as "Jack

Silvertown." But "Jack" could afford to do as she pleased. She was an heiress without parents or near relatives to control her, and if she liked to marry a man who had not so much as a son in his pocket, there was no one but the man himself to say her nay.

Alice told herself that Willie was right to follow her example, and look for a helpmeet who had plenty of gold wherewith to gild the future, but for all this the pain remained, and even Lord Strongleigh's flattery could not altogether dispel it.

Blanche and Julie meanwhile had been following the devices of their own hearts with as much disregard to the improvement of their fortunes as though they never had to learn the meaning of economy or the value of money.

Among the guests at Ellesmere House to-day was Mr. Mowbray Carter, a young and rising barrister, who quickly showed his appreciation of the beautiful by getting as much of Miss Julie Leighton's attention as he could possibly obtain.

"Mr. Carter is a charming man, my dear, but I am told that he has very little beyond his profession, and that will be nothing to marry upon," whispered Lady Ellesmere to Julie, in one of the brief intervals when the young man was not by the girl's side.

"That is usually the case with the most agreeable people," replied Julie, "but happily for me I never stop to think whether a man or a woman has or has not any money when I like them, nor for that matter do you, Lady Ellesmere."

"No, my dear, but Alice was saying something to me the other day that made me think it prudent to warn you that Mr. Carter is a comparatively poor man. I should so like to see you girls married well."

"It's very kind of you," replied the girl, smilingly, "but I am afraid all my friends will be very much disappointed in me. I am bound to be the family failure. I either shall not marry at all, or, as Alice prognosticates, I shall take a man who hasn't a sixpence in his pocket or a second coat to his back."

"Not so bad as that, I hope," laughed the peeress, "and I don't think you were born to be an old maid, Julie."

"I hope not, I'm sure," was the answer; "but who is that *distingue*-looking man who is talking to my sister Blanche?"

"That is Mr. George Mirfield, the great African traveller. He is staying with us for a few days. He is a most fascinating man to talk to, but—"

Julie laughed. She knew what the "but" meant.

The African traveller, like the barrister, had no money worth speaking of, and, therefore, must not be encouraged by girls whose duty in life it was to find rich husbands.

Despite the timely warning, however, neither the traveller nor the barrister were made to feel that the two sisters whom they admired were beyond their reach; indeed, money and marriage were topics discarded from their minds for the present. They thought only of the amusement and enjoyment of the moment, and when the party was over the two sisters and their evident admirers thought they had never spent such a delightful afternoon.

Alice, however, scarcely seemed happier than when she started to the party, which was to mark the beginning of a new era in her life.

She was silent and thoughtful, if not positively sad, and yet she had done all that she had meant to do, and had succeeded beyond her most sanguine expectations, for Lord Strongleigh had asked to be allowed to call, and had gone out of his way to be civil to Colonel Leighton for his daughter's sake.

Not that anything had been said about that public company in which he and the Colonel held so many shares, but this was a matter to be brought up later, and Alice felt that it would be better and wiser for her father to try to convince his lordship of the unwisdom of the step he had threatened to take, than to leave her to talk about it.

"I don't understand business matters, and he would think I was asking a personal favour of him, which would be unfair to me and would convince him at once that the thing in which his money is sunk is rotten, and that you know it; so you must speak to him yourself, papa, though I will lead up to the subject if you like."

Her father sighed and muttered something that was unintelligible. Had he been free from pecuniary trouble, and as other men are, he would have closed his doors to Lord Strongleigh, and have forbidden his daughter to have anything to do with him, but he could not do this.

It might be his eldest daughter's only chance of marrying a wealthy man; and though his lordship was one of the last men whom he would care to have for a son-in-law, the anxious father felt that he was not in a position to say him nay.

So the old man was miserable instead of being elated at his daughter's probable conquest, and he kept away from the girls as much as possible, while he blamed himself unceasingly for having risked his slender fortune in the perilous speculations which threatened to bring him to ruin.

And between the girls there was an amount of silence and reticence about the people they had met at Lord Ellesmere's, and about the entertainment itself, that was unusual to them.

The two younger girls were quite prepared to resent any remarks about their conduct which Alice might be inclined to make; but she was too absorbed with her own affairs to think of their proceedings. Like many another mistaken girl who thinks to play the part of Providence to those belonging to her, she thought she must make a martyr of herself by sacrificing her own feelings to obtain the one object which she believed to be for the general good.

That she did not love Lord Strongleigh she knew, and that she never would love him she felt convinced; but, for all this, she meant to marry him if he asked her—and that he would ultimately ask her she had little doubt.

"I was not born to be a poor man's wife," she mused, sadly. "I have seen too much of genteel poverty not to do all in my power to escape from it; and even if I were content to accept such a lot for myself, I could not help papa and the girls, as I must do. Yes, I must and I will help them! Everything depends upon me. If I shrink back now we shall all sink into a condition of obscurity, if not of absolute want, for old Lord Leighton seems as though he never would die."

She said this bitterly, as though the old man in question were inflicting some wrong upon her by his prolonged career; and, indeed, she felt bitterly towards him, for only that very day she had heard that he was shortly to be married to a girl little older than herself.

"I call it positively immoral of him," she had exclaimed, when she heard the piece of news.

Whereupon her sister Julie laughed, immoderately, and asked Alice if she would think it immoral of their father to take unto himself a second wife—a question that made the elder sister frown, and leave the room in great disgust; but without deigning to make any reply.

Matters went on rapidly after this. Lord Strongleigh called on the Leightons the next day, and Mr. Mirfield and Mr. Carter managed to meet Blanche and Julie, as they went into the village to make some small purchases at the fancy-shop that was largely patronised by the gentry in the neighbourhood of Bitcham.

This fancy-shop was like a small club in its way, and many a match had been forwarded, if it had not been actually made through its agency—through its indirect agency, of course, for Mrs. Greenfield, who kept the unique establishment, would as soon have thought of sweeping a London cross as of becoming a matrimonial agent. It was only a person of Mrs. Greenfield's stamp who could have given

anything like a shop such a tone and character as this place possessed.

She had been well-known in the neighbourhood, some years previously, as the wife of a rich man, who, waking one morning and finding himself ruined, had immediately blown out his own brains, leaving his wife to face the storm which he had not the courage to encounter.

For a time she was utterly crushed by this double blow; but she had an elastic nature, and when the few friends who were left to her talked about making a small subscription among themselves and buying a trifling annuity for her, to keep her from absolute want, she said, bluntly,—

"Don't do anything of the kind! Lend me a few pounds, or give them to me, if you like, for I am too poor to be proud; but help me to fit up a little shop, and then come and buy from me. I'll give you value for your money, and I shall have plenty of occupation instead of sitting down idly to brood upon the past."

Her friends saw the wisdom of this proposal, and very soon Mrs. Greenfield was the mistress of a small house and a large shop.

At one counter were sold wool and silks and cottons, purses, and all the wonderful collection of pretty, useless things which go to make a fancy bazaar; and at another materials for ladies' dresses.

But Mrs. Greenfield offered other attractions besides these to her customers.

She kept a circulating library, and she sold the current magazines; and what made the place very attractive was a kind of reading-room where a customer could take a novel, or read a magazine or newspaper, and could at the same time indulge in tea and coffee; ices in summer, soups in winter, and any other light refreshment he or she might desire.

Naturally enough the success of this undertaking depended upon keeping the customers select; and if Mrs. Greenfield had not herself once moved in good society she would most probably have failed. But many of her old friends would make appointments to meet at her shop, and would have little tea-parties, partly for the novelty of the thing and partly for the good of the house, until from coming here out of kindness many people found it a very convenient place for meeting friends, or whiling away an hour or two, with the certainty of not being annoyed by the presence of vulgar people.

For the worthy mistress of the place very wisely kept one small room, in which only people whom she did not know, or did not wish to encourage, were served, and by rigidly marking the line of demarcation between persons of the class to which she used to belong, and others in a different rank of life, she quickly discouraged the latter, who soon ceased to patronize her.

The Leighton girls were very fond of Mrs. Greenfield. She had known their mother, and in the days of her prosperity she had been very kind to them; and they, like thorough gentlemen, were not too proud to show their gratitude and affection for the bright, plump, little woman, who, even now, managed to do them many kind turns.

This afternoon Julie and Blanche had gone to the "bazaar," as it was called, ostensibly to ask their old friend to get some particular kind of lace for them wherewith to trim some dresses, which she could do for about half the price they would have to pay elsewhere; and, while they were talking, Lord Ellesmere, with Mr. Carter and Mr. Mirfield, came into the shop.

The peer shook hands with the old lady, and introduced his friends; then the young men and the girls talked together until Lady Ellesmere came in, accompanied by Lord Strongleigh.

"I am quite exhausted by the heat, and I must have a cup of tea!" said her ladyship. "You girls, I know, will join me!"

The girls assented, and the two younger men likewise consented to take a cup of the refreshing beverage; but Lords Ellesmere and

Strongleigh declined to join in the light refreshment, and strolled out of the shop, though they separated soon afterwards, the lord of the Manor being appealed to on some trifling matter by one of his tenants.

Lord Strongleigh wandered along aimlessly at first, though he ultimately found himself at the gate of the garden of the house in which Colonel Leighton and his daughters lived.

"I know that two of them are out," he muttered. "Perhaps she is also from home, or else she may be too prudish to see me!"

But at this point in his meditations he paused, for Alice was in the little summer-house in the garden with a book on her lap, and a piece of light embroidery in her hands.

She evidently did not see him, though she was neither reading nor working, and he felt that he was not on sufficiently intimate terms to walk up and join her without going through the form of knocking at the door of the house and asking for her.

A few seconds later the result was the same, for he was sitting near her, and talking pleasantly, though he remarked, carelessly,—

"You are not very secluded here. Anyone in the road, who will take the trouble to look over the hedge, can see you!"

"That is true; but it takes a tall man to look over the hedge—not that there is any comfort in living in this place!" she added, with a shrug of disgust. "We came here for a week, expecting every hour to hear that old Lord Leighton was dead; but that is many years ago, and we seem as far from going to Leighton Hall as ever! It is sorry work waiting for dead men's shoes."

"Yes, I remember now, your father is heir to old Leighton; but I don't think he will have much longer to wait. I heard only the other day that he was on his last legs."

"That is the condition in which I have heard him described to be ever since I can remember," replied Alice, impatiently; "so his last legs must be rather strong ones."

He made no reply.

It struck him as being rather in bad taste this anxiety for the death of even a disagreeable relative, and he did not know that but for her despair and heart sickness from long waiting she would not now be sitting by his side, having coldly and deliberately made up her mind to become his wife when he asked her.

For ever since the death of her mother she had been looking forward to being the mistress of Leighton Hall, and now she had reluctantly come to the conviction that this would never be.

In this frame of mind they were sitting silent for a second or two, when the sound of horses' hoofs in the lane on the other side of the high hedge made them look up to see and be immediately recognised by a lady and gentleman who were riding by.

"Ah! Good afternoon!" exclaimed the loud voice of Jack Silverton; "making hay while the sun shines? Awfully hot, isn't it?"

And with a familiar nod she rode on with Mr. Willie Stone by her side.

"What a very objectionable young woman," said Lord Strongleigh, as the couple disappeared. "I have a perfect horror of an unfeminine woman!"

"So have I!" assented Alice.

"And who is her companion?" asked his lordship, quickly. "From the manner in which he looked at you one might imagine him to be a discarded lover."

Whereupon Alice laughed and blushed as she responded,—

"Miss Silverton is ready to console him for any loss he has sustained. By-the-way, I wonder what can have become of my sisters?"

"They are right enough. I left them with Lady Ellesmere, drinking tea in the shop of some wonderful old woman, to whom I was introduced. Knowing where they were, I thought I should find you at home and alone."

She looked up quickly and met his eyes, in which was an expression the meaning of which could not be misunderstood; but before either of them could utter a word, the garden

swung to with a sudden bang, and on looking up they saw Colonel Leighton.

CHAPTER III.

DUBIOUS CONGRATULATIONS.

ALICE had left her father and Lord Strongleigh in the harbour while she went to order the servant to bring strawberries, cream, claret-cup, and iced coffee into the garden, and on her return she found them discussing the question of the silver mining company in which her father had sunk most of his money.

"It is a positive swindle," his lordship was saying, energetically; "and I am determined to wind it up, whatever it costs me."

"I am afraid it will cost me more than it will cost you," replied the Colonel, grimly. "I am one of the largest shareholders, and I confess I should be glad for the company to keep alive a few years longer, for I believe it will eventually be a great success, and at present it is paying a dividend of fifteen per cent., which to me is a great consideration."

"They are paying the dividend out of the capital," said his lordship, while a hard, stern expression came over his face. "Whatever money you have sunk in the affair is as good as lost, you may make up your mind to that!"

Colonel Leighton's face became very pale, and Alice, who heard this last sentence, gave a startled look at her father, then at the man who aspired to be her lover, and she asked, anxiously,—

"Is anything to be gained by breaking up this company?"

"Only the satisfaction of punishing a set of swindlers!" replied his lordship, savagely. She made no remark, except to slightly shrug her shoulders and sigh, as she cast a lingering glance at her father's pale face.

But though she was perfectly courteous, her manner towards his lordship was colder than it had previously been, and when her sisters returned, bringing Lady Ellesmere and the two young men with them, she devoted herself almost exclusively to the new comers as though she had no special interest in anybody else.

Indeed, her manner underwent such a quiet but decided change that Lord Strongleigh felt he was in disgrace, and that if he persisted in his action against the silver mining company he would no longer be welcome at Thorn Cottage.

"If it were not for old Leighton's shaky condition," he mused, "I should know that she would be glad to take me if I ask her, and the fact of her father losing his money should make her more anxious to be amiable to me. But of course she knows that they will soon be out of this little hole of a place with plenty of money at their disposal."

Then he watched Alice as she talked with her other guests, until he felt that he must and would win her.

Could he have read the girl's thoughts he would have seen that the present condition of things was simply intolerable to her, and that in this frame of mind she would accept him if he proposed to her; but any change in her circumstances—either for better or for worse—would remove her from his influence, and the offer of his hand would have no temptation for her.

"If I cannot save papa from the grief and mortification which the loss of this money will entail, I may as well follow my own inclinations and marry somebody I can care for," she thought, recklessly; "and certainly no woman in her senses would marry Lord Strongleigh from choice."

Perhaps the passing view she had of Willie Stone, riding by the side of Miss Silverton, might have helped her to this conclusion.

In any case she felt so little inclination to become Lady Strongleigh, that she was rather glad of the opportunity of letting his lordship see it.

Besides this she felt vexed with her sisters for encouraging the two young men whose good

looks were so utterly out of proportion with the contents of their pockets, and she was not too well pleased with Lady Ellesmere for throwing such temptations in their way.

But things would not shape themselves to suit Alice Leighton's fancy; the world was all awry with her. She was giving up the man she loved, and forcing herself to contemplate a marriage with a man who was distasteful to her, and she expected her sisters to appreciate her sacrifice and to follow her example.

Blanche and Julie, however, showed no inclination to do either, and when their visitors had gone, and Alice began to reproach them, they told her frankly that if she chose to marry a coarse, middle-aged man for the sake of becoming a peeress she must do so, but they did not admire her taste, and they certainly would never do likewise.

Indignant at being thus misunderstood Alice said truly enough that she had their interest and her father's comfort at heart quite as much as her own; whereupon they told her, with more truth than politeness, that she need not think of sacrificing herself for them; because, in the first place, they would not accept any help from Lord Strongleigh, and, secondly, that from all they had heard of him they felt convinced that he would take good care not to render it.

"Don't suppose that you are going to twist him round your fingers," said Julie, earnestly. "I very much doubt if he will even pretend to yield to you in any matter before he is married, and you may be quite sure that he won't do so afterwards. He seems to me to be a man whose sole object in life is the gratification of self."

"You seem to have made a very profound study of his lordship's character," returned Alice, scornfully, "and the result is not flattering to him or to me; but say what you will about not accepting any kindness from him, unless a very decided change for the better shortly takes place, we shall all of us be in sore need of help from some quarter, for papa has been speculating and absolute ruin stares us in the face."

"When things come to the worst they sometimes mend," retorted Julie, recklessly; "and whether we are rich or poor I would never marry a brute for the sake of his wealth or his title. Would you, Blanche?"

"No, certainly not; and Alice will repent it if she doesn't love the man!" replied Blanche, slowly.

"Love him—love Lord Strongleigh!" ejaculated Julie. "Alice will never do that if she lives a century; and, by the way, I heard this afternoon that Willie Stone and Jack Silverton are engaged to be married. I wonder if it is true."

"It is very probable, I should think," said Alice, coldly, as she turned away. "They passed here this afternoon, and Miss Silverton seemed to be in very high spirits."

Her face was averted as she said this, and therefore she did not observe the expression of anxious pity that came over Julie's countenance as she looked at her.

The younger sister more than guessed the pang which the dismissal or defection of the man she loved must have caused poor Alice.

"She has such a horror of poverty," thought Julie, sadly; "and I am afraid she is taking the very worst course possible to evade it; but she is self-willed and obstinate, as we all are, and she thinks her own way of mending matters the best for herself, and for us all! Poor Alice!"

Then she went off to a quiet nook in the large garden, where she sat down to think of certain tones and glances, rather than words, which made her own heart throb with the hope that Mowbray Carter was far from being indifferent to her.

For the next few days everything was quiet, even to dullness, with the Leighton girls.

Their father made one or two flying visits to town, and came back each time looking pale and worn, till Alice felt her heart ache as she looked at him.

She felt indignant also with Lord Strong-

leigh, for she had no doubt he was the cause of the present trouble, and she showed this anger by sending down a polite excuse for not seeing him when he called. Her two sisters, who had themselves received the peer with cold politeness, were rather surprised when the servant came to say that Miss Alice had a headache, and was sorry she did not feel well enough to leave her room.

He observed their surprise, and noticed also that they were a little more civil to him in consequence; but he readily understood that these two girls were averse to their sister marrying him, and that she was for some reason or other displeased with him.

"It's about that confounded silver mine, I suppose!" he muttered savagely, as he walked back to Ellesmere Hall. "I suppose they are miserably poor, and their father said, 'I remember that winding up the company would be a very serious thing for him!' It's a confounded nuisance. I had promised myself the pleasure of smashing up that swindle, but I suppose I had better wait for a little while. I'll write to Dunbar and tell him to stop further proceedings. I don't think it is too late!"

Second thoughts decided him to telegraph instead of write; and it was well he did so, for otherwise the credit of the company in question would have been ruined.

When he called at Thorn Cottage again, a couple of days afterwards, he was received by Alice, who was smiling, and sweetly amiable.

"I am so glad you didn't carry out your threat with regard to that dreadful company in which papa has sunk so much of his money!" she said, sweetly. "I dare say you are right about its being worthless," she went on, seeing the contraction of his brows; "but what you said worried papa a great deal, and made me quite anxious about him; but since he heard that you had changed your mind he has been quite a different man."

"I only changed my mind for your sake!" he responded bluntly. "My opinion about the rottenness of the affair is the same!"

She bowed her head and sighed, wondering when this condition of anxious expectancy and constantly recurring dread of the pinches of poverty would cease; and he, seizing the opportunity, took one of her hands in his own, and said, with as much tenderness as he could assume,—

"I am afraid I had an interested motive in what I did, and that I hoped for some reward from your hands, Alice!"

"What reward?" she asked, glancing at his face. But her eyes drooped again, as he said, eagerly,—

"I want you to give me yourself. I want you to let me call this little hand my own!"

She made no reply, but she did not withdraw her hand when he pressed it passionately to his lips; and it was only when he clasped her in his arms and kissed her soft cheek that she retreated from his embrace with a suppressed shudder.

He looked at her in surprise, and with something like annoyance, and she faintly smiled, and said, in an apologetic tone,—

"You startled me, and—"

"And what?" he asked, impatiently.

"I don't know if we should get along well together; we have known each other such a short time."

"I have known you long enough to want to marry you," he said, quickly; "and you must know whether or not you like me well enough to let me. Surely that is a question easily answered?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," she responded, smiling at his impetuosity.

"Then why hesitate? Your father will consent, I have no doubt. And now I shall ask you to wear this ring for me until I give you a plainer one to keep it company."

So saying, he placed a diamond ring of great beauty upon her finger, and pressed the hand which it adorned to his lips.

Alice submitted. It was what she had more than half expected, and what, after his con-

cession about the mining company, she had made up her mind to accept.

And yet she was not happy. She was not even proud of her conquest; and she felt relieved when she heard the voices of her sisters, who were coming to the drawing-room.

His lordship uttered an exclamation of annoyance, and the frown had not altogether left his face when the girls came in, slightly flushed and quite elated at the prospect of a boating-party which was to come off at the end of the week.

"Yes, I had forgotten all about it," said Lord Strongleigh, with a yawn. "Most of the guests at Ellesmere will leave the day after the affair. I had meant to go away then myself, but"—with a glance at the ring which gleamed on the finger of his fiancée—"I may delay my departure now."

Blanche and Julie naturally followed the direction of his glance, and both of them turned slightly pale, while the latter involuntarily gasped,—

"Oh, Alice!"

Her sister was both startled and pained at the cry, and his lordship flushed darkly, though he said with a forced smile,—

"You don't seem disposed to congratulate either your sister or me, Miss Julie!"

"Congratulate you!" stammered the girl. "Is it settled then? Are you two going to be married?"

"It looks very much like it!" he replied, holding Alice's hand, so that the ring could be well seen.

"Then I hope you will both be happy!" she said, in a strained tone. "I am sure Alice deserves to be happy."

Then she broke down, and hastily covering her eyes with her handkerchief to hide her tears, hurriedly left the room.

Your sister evidently does not think you will be very happy, however much you may deserve it!" said his lordship; and though Alice tried to make light of Julie's behaviour, and Blanche tried to smooth matters over by saying all the kind and complimentary things she could think of at the moment, Lord Strongleigh did not quickly regain his usual good humour, and Alice had an opportunity of seeing that her future lord and master was anything but saintly in the way of temper.

Still she had made up her mind to marry him.

There comes a time in the lives of all of us when the conditions under which we live become intolerable, and, at all risks, and in spite of any consequences, a change becomes a matter about which there must be no delay.

It may be for better or it may be for worse, but come it must!

In such a frame of mind as this feeling engenders men and women rush into matrimony or into eternity, with a recklessness in both cases which suggests, at least, temporary insanity; and Alice Leighton felt, when her titled lover had left her, that she would almost as willingly be clothed in a shroud as in a wedding garment.

As she thus bitterly meditated her eyes rested on the ring that glittered with such unceasing brilliancy upon her finger, and she wondered what its history had been, and whether it had ever done duty in the same way before now, for its carcase had the appearance of having come direct from a jeweller's.

The voice of Blanche startled her by asking,—

"How old do you suppose Lord Strongleigh to be?"

"You will find his age in the peerage!" was the indifferent reply. "He was fifty-four last birthday."

"And you are twenty-four," continued Blanche, steadily. "Don't you think that a difference of thirty years is too great to exist with any prospect of happiness?"

"It may be, I don't know; and between ourselves, I don't care," was the reckless response. "But, my dear Blanche, pray don't show your feelings so openly as Julie did just now. You may be vexed or angry, or anything

you like with me, but don't let him know it or he may not make you so welcome to our house, when we are married, as I should like you to be!"

"I don't think I shall levy a heavy tax upon Lord Strongleigh's hospitality, whether you marry him or no, Alice!" replied Blanche, proudly; "and I am sure papa will never like him!"

"That is all nonsense!" was the impatient retort. "You will all like him well enough when you know him better, and I hope you will not speak first about the engagement to anybody. There is no secret about it, but I wish him to announce it."

"Of course I shall not spread the news!" replied Blanche. "I feel too sad at the prospect it opens out to care to announce the matter to anybody."

Alice tried to laugh, but she miserably failed. She did succeed in getting into a bad temper, however; and she upbraided Blanche for her want of sympathy and good feeling, and then went off, to shut herself up with her own joy or misery, whichever it might be.

From that time her sisters shunned her, and she them—and thus it happened that as she was walking alone on the thickly-wooded banks of the shallow river the next day, when she saw approaching her a man whom she had resolutely determined henceforth to avoid.

Her determination, however, was useless here.

The river was on one side—the dense wood on the other. If she went on she must meet him, and if she turned back he would be sure to overtake her.

CHAPTER IV.

BY THE RIVER.

"Good afternoon, Alice! What have I done to vex you?" asked Willie Stone, coming up to the girl, and looking at her anxiously.

"Nothing," she replied, coldly; "and you are mistaken in supposing that I am vexed with you."

"That is nonsense! Something has put you out. You are totally changed towards me. A fortnight ago you were quite a different girl. I believe you are angry with me because you have chanced to see me once or twice with Miss Silverton."

"Indeed you are mistaken," she said, coldly. "I think it is very wise of you to devote yourself to Miss Silverton. She is rich and good-tempered, and some people like her."

"And you advise me to ask her to marry me?" he asked, stung by her tone and manner, which seemed to be intended to exasperate him.

"Yes, I do; unless she saves you the trouble by proposing to you herself," she replied, with a spice of malice, which gave him fresh hope, since it showed that she had still some feeling in her heart for him, and he said,—

"You say this to provoke me. You know that I love you, and you have more than once allowed me to believe that you were not indifferent to me."

She was about to make some mocking retort, but her eyes met his, and the disdainful smile died out of her face, and something like a sigh escaped her lips before she said, quietly and even sadly,—

"That is all over, if it ever existed; and you must remember that I never said anything to warrant you in coming to the conclusion you have done."

"Oh, no! you have been cautioning yourself!" he replied, bitterly; "but what has happened to make you adopt this tone? You may as well be frank with me!"

For answer she slowly pulled off one of her long silk gloves and passed the hand upon which gleamed Lord Strongleigh's ring across her eyes.

The flash of the diamond startled him, and for a second or two he did not understand what the ring implied. When he did, however, a

sharp pain shot through his heart. He staggered a pace or two, and would have fallen but for the support of the trunk of a tree to which he clung.

So sharp and sudden was the shock, and he looked so ghastly pale after it, that the girl was thrown off her guard, and she exclaimed, anxiously,—

"Willie, Willie, what is the matter with you? Are you ill? Shall I run for a doctor? Oh, don't look at me like that! Pray, don't!" And she clasped her hands entreatingly.

In a few seconds he rallied sufficiently to speak, though he still looked pale, and his voice was somewhat faint.

"Doctors can do no good!" he said, bitterly; "but I may as well know my fate at once. Does that ring mean that you are going to marry Lord Strongleigh?"

She shivered involuntarily, though she replied steadily enough,—

"Yes, it does. You know it was impossible for you and me to think seriously of each other!"

"Why was it impossible?" he asked, eagerly. "I thought seriously enough of you, Heaven knows!"

"Perhaps I should have said that poor people like ourselves cannot afford to think seriously of each other," she said, quietly, and with some of her old self-possession.

"Ah! Then it is a question of money! But I am not actually poor. I can give you a far better home than the one you now have!"

"That you might easily do," she returned, with something like a sneer; "but the style of living which my father is at present obliged to adopt is not what I was born to, nor what I have a right to expect. My ambition rears a little above Thorn Cottage."

"I beg your pardon," he said, with quiet dignity, and pulling himself together with an effort. "I am well aware that on the ground of wealth I cannot compete with Lord Strongleigh for your hand, and since it is to go to the highest bidder I will at once withdraw my pretensions to it. I need not go through the polite farce of wishing you happiness, because if you marry for wealth and get it you can have nothing more to desire."

Then he lifted his hat, and turned aside into a footpath that led into the wood.

Alice was tempted to call him back and try to make their parting less bitter by saying something that would show him that she herself was pained by it, but prudence whispered that since they must part nothing could make the parting pleasant, while she tried to stifle the whispers of conscience by the assurance that she need not reproach herself since she and Willie Stone had never been really engaged.

This was true enough, but she likewise knew that it was the question of money that had kept them from being so.

More than once he had told her that he loved her, and had pleaded for her love in return, and though she had never promised it she had listened to the flattering tale, and by her silence had seemed to accept the devotion expressed.

That she had never seriously meant to be his wife, and that she had been playing with his tenderest feelings all the time, had, indeed, been flirting with him for her own amusement; was the conviction that now forced itself upon his mind, and that made him feel he could almost despise her.

It was this sense of wrong that gave him for a time a fitful strength, and no one meeting him as he walked along could have imagined the shock he had sustained.

Dreading to overtake him, Alice made her way back by the side of the river.

Arrived at home, she found Lord Strongleigh awaiting her, and it was to propose a clandestine marriage. The girl was anxious to serve her father and sisters, but naturally hesitated to take so grave a step.

This half-maddened him, for the very

doubt which her hesitation implied, and the fear that something would occur to break off the engagement, or at the last moment prevent the marriage, made him intensely eager to have the ceremony performed as quickly and privately as possible, and he urged his proposal upon the doubting girl with so much persistence that she at length consented.

"Won't you ask papa's consent first?" she asked, nervously.

"No!" he replied, promptly. "I have spoken to your father about my love for you, but he cut me very short, and said he could not at present say anything about the fortune he should give you; but you were of age and must please yourself. He let me see quite plainly, however, that he had no great liking for me as a son-in-law."

"You must be mistaken about his not liking you. But shall I tell either of my sisters?"

"No, certainly not; say nothing to anybody. I will get a license and make all necessary arrangements, and you can meet me at eight o'clock the day after to-morrow as though you were going for a morning walk. We will go into the church and get married, and then we can tell our friends about it."

Alice demurred at taking the step in such a hurry; but Lord Strongleigh urged that he had already outstayed his invitation at Ellesmere, and said, truly enough, that if he went away something would very probably occur to divide them for ever.

The girl thought so too, but she little imagined what it was that would make the marriage improbable unless it took place at once. So she consented, yielding to his persuasions instead of following her own instincts, and agreeing not to breathe a word of her intention to anybody until remonstrance would be useless.

How that day and the next passed by she scarcely knew.

Her sisters were absorbed with their own love affairs, and her father spent so little time at home that she saw him only at breakfast and dinner.

But she observed, then, that he seemed more than usually anxious and excited, and that he watched the postman eagerly, and listened for every knock at the door and every swing of the gate as though he were momentarily expecting what would be to him either a fortune or a death-warrant. When questioned by his eldest daughter as to what he was looking for he answered vaguely and evasively; and she jumped to the natural conclusion that some fresh trouble was hanging over them, from the knowledge of which he was trying to save her.

This conviction served to reconcile her to the step she was about to take.

"I shall be one less for papa to provide for, and I shall be able to help him and the other girls materially," she thought, as she rose earlier than her sisters on the morning on which she had promised to meet and to marry Lord Strongleigh.

She dressed as though she were going for an ordinary walk, and she felt embarrassed for a moment when Blanche opened her beautiful blue eyes, and, after a good many yawns, said she would go with her if she liked to wait.

"You will be such a long time dressing," replied Alice, nervously; "and I don't mean to be very long. I don't think I'll wait, dear."

Then she kissed Blanche hurriedly, and left the room in such a strange manner that her sister looked after her wondering.

"I wish I were dressed, for then I would go with her," thought Blanche, anxiously; "but I can't follow her in my nightgown. I do hope she isn't going to do anything foolish. I never knew her to go out so early for a walk alone, and I always suspect that Lord Strongleigh wants to compromise her in some way or other to make her glad to marry him." He must know that we are none of us fascinated with the prospect of an alliance with him, and I

believe that in her heart Alice loathes him almost as much as I do."

Meanwhile Alice hastened out of the house, not daring to get a cup of tea as she had at first intended, lest Blanche should persist in accompanying her.

As she was going out of the garden gate she saw the postman at a little distance coming towards the cottage.

On any other day she would have waited for him; and even now, remembering her father's recent anxiety about letters, she felt inclined to loiter, but she thought if she did so she might be delayed, and in a very few minutes Lord Strongleigh and the clergyman would both be waiting for her. So she walked on without waiting to see what the messenger had for her.

Half-way down the road she met a telegraph boy, and she thought that perhaps something might have happened to prevent Lord Strongleigh from carrying out his programme, and that he had telegraphed to tell her so.

With this idea in her mind she asked the boy if he was going to Thorn Cottage.

"Yes, miss," was the answer.

"Is the telegram for Miss Leighton?" she asked.

"No, miss; it's for Colonel Leighton," was the reply; and he showed her the envelope.

She read the name upon it, but she could not know what was written inside, and she went on her way unconscious that the contents of that telegram might have changed her destiny had she known it in time.

The impatient peer was waiting for her. His face was alternately flushed and pale, and his red hair looked aggressive in the morning sunlight, except where it was bleached by time to silver.

All the rough lines on his face, all the mean creases round his full, sensual eyes, and his thick, coarse mouth showed more plainly now than Alice had ever before seen them, and she shrank from him with a feeling of repulsion which she could not overcome.

"You are in good time," he said, with a smile which she did not like. "I did not expect you for another ten minutes."

"No; I should not have been here so soon but Blanche wanted to come with me, and I was afraid if I did not start early something would happen to detain me; but now I think we had better put this matter off for a few weeks. I don't feel comfortable in taking such a serious step without the knowledge of my father."

"That is preposterous!" he said, brusquely. "Your father has nothing to do with it. You are of age, and can do as you like. Everything is ready, and the clergyman is waiting—come!"

Still she hesitated, while a shudder, as though from a sudden chill, passed over her frame.

Perhaps it was that the church felt cold as she came out of the bright sunlight, or it might have been a warning against what she was about to do, but she shivered as though she had ague, and she felt positively unnerved when she saw the white-robed clergyman walk out of the vestry up to the altar.

The feeling that it was too late to turn back made her passive, as her companion placed her hand on his arm and led her up to the altar-rails.

And yet she felt as if at this last moment she would give all she might ever possess to escape from the man to whom she was binding herself for life.

Still, she gave no expression to this feeling, and the service took place as though she were a most willing bride, and he a mild, though middle-aged bridegroom.

It was soon over.

The ring was upon her finger, the register had been signed, and soon they found themselves outside the church-door.

"We have made no plans," said the bridegroom, as they walked slowly from the church.

"What do you wish to do?"

"I must go home and tell my father and

sisters what I have done," replied Alice faintly.

"Shall I come with you?"

"No, don't come with me!" she answered, hurriedly. "Come in an hour or two's time, then we can discuss what is to be done."

"Oh, I have decided what we will do," he said, quietly. "We will go to London this afternoon, and start for Paris to-morrow; but I will do as you wish now, and leave you at your father's door."

And he did so; parting rather like a mere friend than a newly-made bridegroom.

Alice tried to look, and even feel, as usual when she went into the breakfast-room, where the family were assembled, but the effort was so far a failure that, absorbed as they were with what had happened in her absence, the change in herself struck them so forcibly that Julie exclaimed,—

"Here you are at last, Alice! I see you know the news, and think you ought to look solemn for decency's sake!"

"What news?" she asked, startled by her sister's joyous tone.

"What news! Don't you know?" cried Julie, brightly. "Then allow me to introduce you to Lord Leighton! We start for Leighton Hall this very day. What a precious muff you were to go out for a walk, on this morning of all mornings of the year!"

"Lord Leighton dead at last!" she ejaculated, trying to realize that what she had looked forward to for so many years had come too late to be of any benefit to her.

"Yes; he died late last night," said her father. "I have been expecting the news for the last two days, but I did not say a word to you, lest the reports that came to me should prove unfounded. But there is no doubt about it now; and you girls need no longer practise severe economy, nor look twice at every shilling you spend! Why, what is the matter, Alice?"

The question might well be asked, for Alice had fainted.

They took off her hat and cape, and tried all in their power to revive her, and she was just beginning to show signs of returning consciousness as Julie was trying hard to pull off her gloves.

This was not an easy thing to do. The kid seemed to cling to the hand, and but for the fear of accident the anxious sister would have cut the gloves away.

At length the small, white hands are uncovered, and the sisters are beginning to rub them when a low cry of pained surprise escapes Blanche, and she points to the fourth finger of Alice's hand, upon which is a plain gold ring.

Her father sees it, and exclaims in a tone of dismay,—

"Married!"

"It must have taken place this morning," says Blanche, "for she had not that ring on when she went out. I particularly noticed her hand!"

But her father made no reply.

A feeling of bitterness against his favourite daughter filled his heart.

To think that she had stolen out of the house for such a purpose, and had so little regard for his feelings or for those of her sisters; as to take this step without so much as telling them of her intention, wounded him to the quick.

It was the first drop of bitterness in his new cup of happiness, and it seemed powerful enough to destroy all his previous joy.

For of what value was his long looked-for wealth if his daughters were not to benefit by it; and Alice, of whom he had always thought so much, had married a man whom no pure-minded woman could love, and had done it in a manner which showed she was ashamed of her own conduct.

So he sat sad and silent, looking at her coldly; and when the poor girl returned to consciousness, her father and sisters all seemed changed to her.

A glance at her own uncovered hand told

her that they knew of the step she had taken, and she said, plaintively,—

"You are angry with me, and yet I did it for the best."

"Then the best is as bad as it can be," said her father, gravely. "The girls and I have been talking of what Alice will say and what Alice will do, and now we must make all our plans without you, for you are no longer one of us."

"Oh! father, don't say that!" she cried, passionately, throwing herself on her knees at his feet; "it was because I feared that we were sinking deeper and deeper into poverty, and because I thought I could help you and the girls that I married Lord Strongleigh, and I consented to a secret marriage this morning only to save expense. That was my only reason for not telling you all about it."

"It is too late to talk of all this now," said her father, with grave sadness, as he helped her to rise and led her to a seat. "I am grieved, deeply grieved, by your want of confidence; but you have chosen your own course, and all we can now do is to accept the situation and make the best of it."

Alice clasped her hands drearily.

This was her wedding morning, the day that should have been the happiest of her life, while it was the most miserable she had ever spent.

Neither Blanche nor Julie uttered one word of congratulation to the sister who had that morning, by her marriage, become a peeress, for they feared that she had sacrificed love to ambition, and that before long she would bitterly repent her choice.

They showed her a great deal of quiet kindness, however; one poured her out some coffee, another cut some slices of tongue and put on her plate, and both of them urged her to eat, as she would have a trying day before her.

Yet for all their kindness the light meal was a very sad one, and it was only a glance at the clock and the recollection that the man who was now her husband would make his appearance very shortly, that nerved Alice to ask what her father proposed to do.

"I thought of leaving here at twelve o'clock," said her father, "and of going down to Leighton Hall at once. Whether you and your sisters would go with me, or stay here until after the funeral, was to be decided by you. Now, however, they must please themselves."

Alice sighed.

Her efforts to benefit her family had, even at this early stage, the effect of adding to their discomfort.

"But never mind us; we shall do well enough," continued her father. "What are your own plans? Where is your husband?"

"Lord Strongleigh will be here in a few minutes," she replied, looking at her watch. "He wanted to come from church with me; but I thought I should prefer telling you alone, and spending a last half-hour with you and my sisters."

There was so much pathos in her voice that Julie began to cry, and to lament the haste that had made her sister rush into matrimony; and while the tears were in her own eyes and Alice was also weeping freely, the happy and triumphant bridegroom arrived.

The bride hastily dried her eyes, but Julie made no attempt to hide her grief, and the reception of the new member of the family was cold, even to frigidity.

But Lord Strongleigh was not to be easily repressed. He had heard the news of old Lord Leighton's death, and he now congratulated his father-in-law upon his good fortune, while he made some bungling excuse about the clandestine marriage, which, if it had not been so quiet, could not have taken place without some delay in consequence of the death in the family.

This remark made the new peer rap out such a rebuke that it seemed for a moment as though something like a family quarrel were about to ensue.

Blanche, however, interposed, and attempted to throw oil upon the troubled waters.

"It is useless finding fault with what cannot be undone," she said, as high words seemed imminent; "and, for Alice's sake, papa, I think you might try to forgive the secrecy of this marriage, if Lord Strongleigh is kind to her, and makes her a good husband."

"And am I to take your opinion as to my qualifications as a husband, Miss Blanche?" asked the new bridegroom, with a sneer.

"No; one must live under your roof to see you in your true character, I am told," retorted Blanche; "and Alice is the only one of us likely to do that; but if she can put up with you we shall not grumble."

"That is very considerate of you," he sneered again. "Have you no instructions to give me, Julie?"

"Since you appeal to me, I may as well tell you frankly that I am sorry Alice has married you, for you are nearly old enough to be her grandfather," said Julie, with a toss of her classically-shaped head; "but she knows that her father's house will always be open to her if she is not happy in yours."

"It is kind of you to remind her of that; but you never did like me, Julie, and you made no pretence about it; and now, Alice, if you think I have listened to a sufficient number of pleasant speeches from your amiable family, I think we will go."

Alice looked at her father and then at her husband appealingly, but neither of them showed any disposition to be friendly with the other. The former felt himself injured; and the latter, having won what he had played for, had no longer any desire to hide his true character.

"Good-bye, papa," she said, taking her father's hand in her own.

He kissed her kindly though coldly, and then she turned to embrace her sisters.

"I would not go with him if I didn't feel inclined, if I were you," whispered Blanche. "He can't take you away against your will."

Alice paid no heed to the suggestion, however. She certainly was not inclined to go—but she went.

The carriage in which Lord Strongleigh had arrived was waiting at the gate, and the couple entered it, and were driven away.

They had not proceeded more than a quarter of a mile before a carriage, coming from an opposite direction, passed them, and his lordship, on recognizing the solitary occupant, flung himself back into a corner, muttering, "Just in time!"

Alice asked what he meant, but could get no satisfactory reply; and she did not know that the woman in that carriage was going to Thorn Cottage to seek an interview with herself.

CHAPTER V.

IN HER CAGE.

MORE than a year had passed since that morning when Alice Leighton left her father and sisters to become Lord Strongleigh's wife.

And what a year it has been to her! Looking back upon it she shudders, and wonders how she has lived through it.

Not that there is any change for the better now, but as use is second nature, so she has become accustomed to what once seemed unbearable, for her husband has completely isolated her from all her friends.

He has done all in his power to offend her father and sisters; and though Julie still keeps up something like a correspondence with her, Alice knows that the letters are read, and often suppressed by her tyrant.

The story of the woman who came to her father's house directly after she had left it has reached her ears, together with other tales of a like character; but though Lord Strongleigh claims every license for himself, he is as jealous of his wife, and keeps her as closely guarded as though he were some Eastern potentate, and she his slave.

Indeed, poor Alice has found that marriage has given her nothing but a tyrant.

In the olden days she was fond of society and gaiety, and she and her sister were constantly going to balls and parties, but now she goes nowhere, and sees no one but servants.

For her husband has brought her down to Strongleigh Castle, which stands alone on the top of a hill, and is about five miles from anything like a decent habitation. And here he has kept her, refusing even to allow her to invite Lady Ellesmere, or to take her on a visit to her old friend.

At first Alice submitted, because she was so intensely miserable that she did not care what became of her.

The knowledge that the wealth to which her father had so long looked forward had come at the very hour when she had given it up, was dreadful enough; but when she learnt also that Willie Stone had likewise become a rich man, she felt as though the Fates themselves were against her.

So she had yielded passively to her tyrant's exactions until rebellion, when she tried it, could meet with nothing but signal defeat.

And here she lives like a state prisoner, watched by her servants, with no one coming to see her, and she herself going to see no one.

How long this kind of thing, if left undisturbed, is likely to last, it is impossible to say; but sooner or later an end must come to it, and Alice is beginning to feel that the utmost limit of endurance is almost reached.

The summer has been short this year, and though it is only August the wind howls dismally round the great building which commands an extensive view of the country for miles round.

Also, the air is cold and wintry, and the crimson velvet dress which Alice wears not only becomes her slender figure, but looks warm and seasonable.

She is still as quaint looking and as graceful as ever, and whatever mental suffering she has gone through it has not as yet left any permanent lines upon her face.

This afternoon she sits in a small drawing-room, in which she spends most of her time.

A small fire burns in the polished grate, for she feels chilly and solitary, as she watches the trees which sway so wildly in the wind, which seems to shake them to their very roots.

Her husband has ostensibly gone away for a few days, but experience has taught her that, despite his formal leave taking, he may be close at hand, and closely watching all her movements.

He has played her this unmanly trick more than once, probably with no other purpose than that of keeping her in constant dread of his watchful eyes; for hitherto he has never discovered anything that could excite even his jealous rage.

But Alice is nervous to-day, something in Julie's last letter has disturbed her, and she is not certain whether or not her husband has read what troubles her so much.

"I suppose I had better tell you," wrote her sister, "that I met Willie Stone the other day, and that he said he was determined to see you. I begged him not to attempt to do so, because your husband is so absurdly jealous; but he has heard some highly-coloured story of the cruel way in which you are treated, and though I tried to convince him that you were not unhappy, and even showed him one of your letters to me, he declared that your guarded words only convinced him more completely that you were kept a prisoner, and were not allowed to write freely to your own sister."

Then followed a matronly exhortation to Alice to be careful, and not give her old lover an interview, for Julie was married now, and her ideas of wifely duty were such as one would expect from a woman who was perfectly contented and happy in her husband's love.

But Alice needed no advice on the subject; terror of her husband, and, perhaps a secret dread of her own heart, were quite sufficient

to make her avoid meeting the man whom she had once loved, and of whom she now sometimes thought tenderly.

The knowledge that Willie is still unmarried, and that he loves her, makes her heart throb tumultuously as she sits here alone; and she is startled by the entrance of a servant who hands her a card, and says the gentleman wishes to see my lady.

Her face flushes as she reads the name of the man of whom she was thinking; but she feels convinced that some trap has been laid for her by her husband, and she says, coldly,—

"I am engaged. I receive no visitors."

"My lord said—" began the man.

But she silenced him imperiously. She knew that the fellow was in her husband's pay, and she believed that some abominable trap had been laid for her.

"Take my message!" and, so saying, Lady Strongleigh resumed her book, and the man slowly and sulkily left the room.

As soon as the door closed upon him she pressed her hand upon her heart, and for a few seconds gave herself up to the agony of despair that came over her.

At this moment of her life, Alice Strongleigh was weak and unstable as water, and had her old lover stood before her and urged her to fly with him, she knew in her heart that she would have yielded.

She feels humiliated at her own condition of mind, and she closes her eyes and repents again, as she has repented hundreds of times already, the one act of her life that gave her into the power of a man who inspires her only with the profoundest dread.

In this condition of mind she falls asleep, and she does not observe the door gently open and Willie Stone enter.

A slight sound wakes her, and she starts and looks about her in surprise.

Strange are the workings of a woman's heart, and stranger still the influence of her pride.

But a few minutes ago the memory of this man had made her weak, now the sight of him, unwelcome and unbidden in her husband's house, made her strong, and she rose to her feet, and, looking at him coldly, and with unmistakable displeasure, she said,—

"I told my servant to inform you, Mr. Stone, that I was engaged."

The young man had advanced towards her eagerly, with extended hands, and with warm words of love upon his lips; but her words and manner chilled him, and he paused, looked at her with a curious expression of mingled astonishment and entreaty, and faltered, awkwardly,—

"Yes, he did tell me so, but I had heard dreadful stories about the way in which your husband had treated you, until I could no longer bear the thought of your wretchedness, and I determined, at every risk to you and to myself, to come and rescue you."

"Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Stone, that I have a father who could 'rescue' me, as you term it, if I were in the condition you suppose? And do you think I am likely to be very grateful to a man who has done all in his power, without any encouragement on my part, to compromise me in the eyes of my husband and of his servants?"

"I never thought you would look upon my visit in that light," he replied, roused by her tone and manner to defend his unwarrantable intrusion.

"How did you expect me to regard it?" she asked, looking at him so coldly and so steadily that he must have been a vain man indeed if he had any longer cherished the belief that she secretly loved him.

And, indeed, in very truth, any lingering sentiments of the kind which she might have felt up to this time had died a sudden death as she looked at him and felt, with just indignation, that he had insulted her by coming in this manner, as though he were a favoured lover for whom she was ready to forfeit her fair fame, her self-esteem, and all that makes

life worth living to a woman who was as pure as she was proud.

More than this, by his conduct he had given her husband some apparent ground for jealousy, and even her proud heart quailed at the prospect of the future that lay before her.

"I am afraid that I judged of your feelings by my own," he said, humbly; "but don't look so severely upon me, Alice; let us at least be friends."

And he extended his hands entreatingly.

"There can be no friendship between you and me, Mr. Stone," she replied, disdainfully. "A man who could force himself into a lady's presence in the absence of her husband is not one whom I should care to number among my friends. I only regret that Lord Strongleigh is not at home to give you his opinion of your conduct."

"Lord Strongleigh is here," said a voice that she knew full well, and her husband stepped forward and confronted the intruder.

"I am glad you have returned, dear," she said, with a faint smile; "and I will leave you to entertain this gentleman, who must have bribed the servants in whom you place so much confidence, or he could never have made his way into my presence."

Then, without another glance at the intruder, she left the room.

But Mr. Stone did not wait to have any conversation with Lord Strongleigh, and he walked straight out of the house, no one seeking to detain him.

Never in his life had he been so mortified—never had his pride been brought so low; but he was cured of his love.

No man could continue to love a woman who showed as plainly, as Lady Strongleigh had done, that she despised him; and when he became calmer, and could dispassionately view his own conduct, he felt that to many people it might seem perfectly unjustifiable.

True, he had been excited by the stories of the cruel way in which the young wife was supposed to be treated by her jealous husband; but as these seemed to be quite unfounded he felt that some apology from him was due, and he wrote a letter addressed to Alice, which was never answered.

In truth, it fell into the hands of her husband, who, knowing that Stone was coming to see and rescue his old love, had pretended to go away from home to give the lovers a chance of meeting.

The servants had acted according to his orders in accepting a bribe and admitting the young man whom their mistress had refused to see; and the suspicious husband had listened to every word of the interview which followed.

That he was surprised at the result might be taken for granted; but he was likewise disappointed. For he was weary of the wife who, from a feeling of duty, submitted to his tyranny, and yet whose pride could neither be bent nor broken.

"Confound her!" he muttered, savagely, as he read Willie Stone's letter of apology, and crushed it up in his hand. "Confound the jaded she is as cold and unbending to others as she is to me; but I will subdue her yet, or drive her to take some step that shall set me free. As it is, she neither loves me nor submits to me."

CHAPTER VI.

"FREE!"

LADY STRONGLEIGH stood at one of the windows of her bedroom, her eyes fixed vacantly upon the wide stretch of flat, uninteresting country, of which she commanded a view.

A fortnight had passed since Willie Stone's unwelcome visit, and since that day matters have been growing worse instead of better between her husband and herself.

She had not condescended to reproach him for his unworthy meanness in spying upon

her actions, and in trying to entrap her into compromising herself; but when he spoke of her old lover she looked at him with such quiet scorn that his silence stung him more than the most violent outburst of indignation could have done.

To-day she is more agitated than she cares for her tormentor to see, and she has retired to her own room to make up her mind to a step which she feels can be delayed no longer.

A letter from her sister Blanche, inviting her and her husband to her wedding, has given Lord Strongleigh an opportunity for indulging in very strong language, in which he declared that he would never sit down under the roof of his father-in-law, and he further said that if Alice went to visit her own people, she should never come back to him.

It was this threat that had so far thrown her off her guard, as to make her involuntarily clasp her hands and say,—

"Then I will go!"

"Go!" thundered her tyrant. "Go—but never think of me as your husband again!"

"I don't think I am likely to trouble you with my claims!" she said, coldly, as she rose to leave the room.

But infuriated at her answer, mild though it was, he caught her by the shoulder, shook her violently, and then flung her into a corner of the room.

The noise made the servants rush upon the scene; but they were all too much afraid of their master to do anything towards helping their mistress, who rose slowly to her feet, and, without a word or a look to the right or to the left, walked quietly and painfully to her own room.

Here she flung herself upon a couch, scarcely conscious of the physical pain of the bruises she had sustained, so all-absorbing was the indignation which she felt at the unmanly outrage perpetrated upon her.

"I will leave him for ever!" she said, in low, resolute tones. "From henceforth I will be no wife to him. I married him that I might help those who happily needed no help; for I could not have given it, and, despite his cruelty, I have been a faithful wife to him. But the end has come. If he struck me again I think I should kill him. The question now is, shall I go to my father, or shall I write and entreat him to come and fetch me?"

She rose from her couch and went to the window.

"Would her father come if she sent for him? Would any letter or telegram, which she might dispatch, be allowed to reach him?"

This last was the most serious consideration, and while she was still wondering what to do she saw a man on horseback ride out from the Castle gates.

No need to ask who it was that sat his horse as though he were part of the animal, for no other man in the county, beside Lord Strongleigh, would dare to ride Wild Madge, and freely use both whip and spur.

Alice watched him, and she saw how he lashed and goaded the beautiful creature until from very pity she half extended her clasped hands, as though to entreat him to show some mercy to the poor dumb thing.

But there was no pity in the heart of the man who treated his horse as brutally as he treated his wife.

Mercy and compassion were unknown to him except by name. The one overmastering passion of his life was to make all around him subservient to his will; and to-day, as he had not quite broken his wife's heart, he determined to break the spirit of Wild Madge.

"She'll never stand the spur, my lord!" had exclaimed one of the grooms, apprehensively, as his lordship sprang into the saddle.

A savage cut on the shoulders with the riding whip was the man's reward for his caution; then the cruel steel was driven into the sides of the mare, who gave one great leap, and then bounded off with the speed of the wind.

Headless of bridle, whip and spur, Wild Madge flew over the green sward and into the

Home Park, and before the reckless rider could realize his danger the infuriated creature had dashed under a tree with a low hanging branch, and her tormentor was, in far less time than it takes to tell the story, swept from the saddle and flung bleeding and dead on the ground.

The servants who had followed at a distance, feeling sure that some accident would occur, lifted him up and carried him back to the castle.

Alice, still standing at her window, saw them come, and thought that an unfortunate servant or possibly a stranger had been ridden over and injured by her husband; and it was not until a servant came to break the dreadful news to her that she knew that she was free.

"Free!"

She gasped as the word rose to her lips, and she tried to feel grieved that freedom came to her in such a way.

"He brought it on himself," she heard one of the servants whisper to another, and she felt that it was true, and that Wild Madge had that morning avenged more wrongs than her own.

The day after the accident Lord Leighton came to Strongleigh Castle to comfort his daughter in her widowhood.

Prosperity had agreed well with the old soldier, and he looked younger and stronger than when his daughter last saw him.

Alice threw herself into his arms when they met, and, for the first time since the shock of her husband's death, tears fell from her eyes as she moaned,—

"I made a useless sacrifice, father, and oh! how bitterly I have suffered for it!"

"My poor child," said her father, soothingly, "I know that you have suffered, but I could not help you before; now you shall come home with me, for when Blanche is gone I shall be alone."

They stayed at the Castle until the funeral was over, and Alice then learnt, to her amazement, that by her husband's will, executed a few weeks after their marriage, he left her the whole of his personal fortune, the estates and title only going to the next-of-kin.

She went back with her father to Leighton Hall, and tried to take up the threads of her old life where she had left them.

But we can never go back to the past, and Alice found that her old life had passed away, and was among those things which do not return.

Her sister's marriage was necessarily quiet, following as soon as it did upon Lord Strongleigh's death; and when Blanche and her husband had gone away Alice and her father were left in the old mansion together.

They were very fond of each other; but neither of them could feel quite satisfied, and when Alice discovered that her father was meditating marriage with a girl two or three years younger than herself she felt that Leighton Hall would not much longer be a home for her.

"If all of my daughters were not married I might hesitate about bringing home a young wife," she heard him say; "but as it is I have no one to consider but myself. Alice is wealthy, and she will be sure to marry again, or to take a house of her own, and go in for some of the hobbies of the day. I know her restless spirit too well to believe that my quiet home will satisfy her long."

"As though I should ever marry again after the experience I have had," exclaimed Lady Strongleigh, indignantly; "and as though I had ever shown signs of impatience and restlessness!"

Whereupon Julie, who was with her sister at the time, laughed immoderately, though she declined to give any reason for her mirth, and she was discreet enough not to mention the name of Lord Arthur Drummond, a friend of her husband, who had shown great interest in the fair, young widow.

Had she done so Alice would have been very indignant, and would probably have persistently avoided the young man; but she never suspected her danger, and Julie, who wished

her sister to be as happy as she was herself, was too wise to warn her.

That she was right in her judgment the fashionable papers a couple of years afterwards testified, when they announced the marriage of Alice Lady Strongleigh with Lord Arthur Drummond, the second son of the Marquis of Baneroff.

"It is a marriage of love this time," said Lady Ellesmere to her husband, when she heard the news; "and I am very glad she has married Drummond, for I always felt that I was to blame in helping her to marry Lord Strongleigh."

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

A witness who had been called to give evidence as to the defendant's character testified that he had always moved in good society. "What do you mean by good society?" asked the Court. "Society in which it is fashionable to speak evil," promptly answered the witness.

A pretty little fairy, who lives in Tillington, and who is very fond of having Bible stories read to her, ran to her mamma, the other day, and said, eagerly, "Oh, mamma, please read me that pretty story again about little Moses with the bulls rushing after him!"

CHARLEY went to see the apple of his eye the other evening, and, after a proper amount of affectionate conversation, said, "I'll give you a pair of earrings, dear, if you'll earn them by letting me bore your ears." "Haven't I earned them already, then?" queried the fair object of his affections.

THE LAW OF COMPENSATION.—Maud: "Isn't it strange, dear, all the fellows who flirt with me are married men? I cannot think what has become of all the bachelors." Gertrude (who is not envious—oh, dear, no!): "Possibly flirting with the wives of your admirers!"

THE TERRIBLE CHILDREN.—Toto is sitting upon the knees of an old friend, whose mouth she inspects with an indiscreet attention. "How does it happen that you have no longer any teeth?" she asked. The old gentleman, a little bothered, replied: "Because they have fallen, my little one." Toto, after reflection: "But why didn't you pick them up?"

CHILDISH SIMPLICITY.—A lady who bought some oakes at a pastrycook's shop, the other day, noticed while making her purchase a little boy of six or seven years with his face pressed against the window, devouring with his eyes the various good things displayed. With womanly sentiment, the lady took a cake and carried it to the little boy. The youngster turned away in disgust, saying, "I don't want it; pa made it!"

ONE REDEEMING FEATURE.—"No, sir," said old Tostewater; "there is good in every man." "Yes," said Lawyer Greenbag; "there was Jim Stanger; he drank, stole, swore, lied, and followed a bad life for years, and yet when we arrested him the other day—" Here Tostewater interrupted: "You told him of his old mother, of his once happy home? You found some redeeming thing about him?" "We did," said Greenbag, as expectant eyes were fixed upon him; "we found something redeeming about him—it was a pawn ticket."

AN IRISH BULL.—Teddy O'Rafferty was complaining of the many trials he was called upon to endure, and among them the duty he had to perform the first thing each morning. "What is it, me bye, that you have to do first thing in the morning?" asked his father. "I know well enough, fayther, what I have to do first thing in the morning," replied Teddy, laughing. "What is it, ye spalpeen?" "The first thing I have to do in the morning is to get the kindling ready the night before."

A MOUTHFUL.—"Mr. Brown, do you eat nuts?" asked a four-year-old friend of his sister's beau. "Why, Johnnie?" responded Mr. Brown. "Cos sister says she wishes you wouldn't talk like you had a mouthful of nuts." Sister faints, and Brown remembers that he has an engagement in Australia.

SAVE THE BOY.—"A small boy called: it lookin' glass," when his father said: "It isn't lookin' glass, it is 'mirror'!" "Why, don't you have to look in it if you want to see yourself?" asked the boy. "Yes." "Well, then, it must be a look in glass." "Wife," said the old man, "I'm afraid that boy is shaping himself for a minstrel or a funny newspaper paragrapher. We'd better put him to some trade soon, if we want to save him."

THE PARASOL.—Before marriage: "Excuse me, George. Did my parasol hurt you?" "Oh, no, my dear. It would be a pleasure if it did." After marriage: "Great heavens! There was never a woman under the sun that knew how to carry a parasol without scratching a fellow's eyes out." "And there never was a man that knew enough to walk on the right side of a woman with a parasol." "There isn't any right side to a woman with a parasol."

AN ENGRAVING.—He had a very rubicund face, suggestive of a dissipated life. "As he was walking up the street, a gentleman remarked: 'That fellow is so highly coloured that he reminds me of a chromo.' He reminds me more of an engraving than a chromo," remarked a bystander. "How so?" "Well, you see, an engraving always has a glass in front of it, and a chromo hasn't."

NINE TO ONE.—Foote having dined at the Merchant Tailors' Hall, he was so well pleased with the entertainment that he sat till most of the company had left the table. At length rising, he said: "Gentlemen, I wish you both a very good-night." "Both!" exclaimed one of the company. "Why, you must be drunk, Foote; here are twenty of us." "I have been counting you, and there are just eighteen; and as nine tailors make a man, I am right. I wish you both a very good-night!"

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW.—Y, who had been recently married, was annoyed at seeing his mother-in-law call at his house. "He was obliged to kiss her, but this politeness vexed him. The other day the mother-in-law called just as Y was kissing his dog. 'Horrible!' cried the old lady. 'My son, do not think that I shall allow my cheek to be kissed by lips that have kissed a dog.' Y appeared very sad. Since that day, however, whenever the mother-in-law has called she has always found her son in-law kissing Azor. No dog was ever so much loved as that one."

DITTO.—An old Scotch story is good enough to be lately revived in the Scotch papers: One night Sandy told her that he "liket" her "awful wee." She simply responded "ditto." Sandy was not very sure what that meant; so the next day, while at work, he said: "Father, can you tell me what 'ditto' is?" "Oo, ay, Sandy!" replied his father. "Dae ye see that cabbage?" "Yes." "And dae ye see that ither ane that it's just the same?" "Yes." "Weel, that's ditto." "Gracious goodness!" exclaimed Sandy. "Did she call me a cabbage-head? I'll na' wed her."

HE KNEW ONE.

A short time ago, at a school during a lesson on the animal kingdom, the teacher put the following question:

"Can any of you name to me an animal of the order edentia—that is, a front tooth toothless animal?"

A boy, whose face beamed with pleasure at the prospect of a good mark, replied:

"I can." "What is it?" "Well, what is the animal?"

"My grandmother," replied the boy in great glee.

When is a vegetable not a vegetable? When it is what you cauliflower.

THE houseman is generally proud of his race.

The professional money-lender never neglects his business. He always takes all the interest possible in it.

PERHAPS you heard about the boy who complained of the stone as an impediment in his peach.

A little boy was told by his mother to take a powder she had prepared for him. "Powder!" powder!" said he. "Mother, I ain't a gun!"

"Why, Pat, you are surely not going to turn coward?" said an officer to a timid soldier. "Why, ahure," replied Pat. "I'd rather be a coward for fivve minutes than a corpse for the rest of me loife."

Mamma: "Why are you always beating your doll?" That isn't twice. "Bliss: "Yes it is. I must beat the doll, because I don't want papa to tell me, as he always tells you, that I am spoiling my children."

A young composer has just written for a soprano voice a beautiful song entitled "Would that I were young again." It has become so much time wasted. The woman can't be found who will sing it.

"Show me a sensible man who is opposed to capital punishment!" exclaimed a lawyer, while in conversation during a recess of court. "I am," replied a gentleman sitting near. "And why so, sir; give your reasons." "Because I am sentenced to be hanged next month."

A BRAVE FELLOW.—"Charley is a brave fellow," remarked Brown. "Faw men would care to go about at night as he does, unarmed. I should think he would be afraid that somebody would take his life." "Nonsense!" exclaimed Fogg; "robbers never take anything that is utterly worthless. They might take his money, but his life is never."

KICK THE BUCKET.—One of those nice little boys who make a speciality of always saying just what they ought not to, laboriously lugged a large wooden pail into the presence of his maternal grandmother and respectfully asked her to kick it. "Kick it! and why should I kick it?" demanded the old lady. "Papa said yesterday that he had been waiting a long time for you to kick the bucket, and I thought I would ask you to do it." And papa, who sat on the opposite side of the room, swallowed his Adam's apple, and would have attempted an explanation, but the maternal grandmother was gone.

RECLAIMED LANDS.

"WALTER," said Miss Bubler to the ardent suitor who knelt at her feet, "I cannot marry you; for some time I have smelled whiskey on your breath. I can never marry a man that drinks, for I am the secretary of a temperance organization."

The young man rolled his eyes in agony of matrimonial despair, and solemnly hiccupped.

"Then you don't love me," he said.

"Oh, do not tear my heart. I do love you with condensed affection, but you are a drunkard, and I cannot marry you this evening."

"Melvina, you want me to say some other evening, so you can accuse me of revamping an old gag."

"You lacerate me. It is the drinking I want you to stop. My decision is final. I cannot marry you unless you reform. Promise me that you will swear off."

"I will!" exclaimed the young man, arising.

"For how long?"

"What is to-day?"

"Tuesday."

"I will swear off until Wednesday."

"Oh, Walter, I have reclaimed you!" and she threw her arms around his neck. They were married.

SOCIETY.

THE Prince of Wales has been staying at Baden with the Dowager Duchess of Hamilton (Princess Mary of Baden); the Duchess of Manchester, Count and Countess Festetics, and Lord Charles Montagu were invited to meet his Royal Highness.

Among the novelists of next season will, it is said, be Lady Diana Huddleston. Her work will deal with British society somewhat after the fashion of Lord Beaconsfield's fictions, and some side lights may be expected to be thrown on leading characters.

THE newest parasols have sticks of coloured or stained ivory of golden-brown shades, with a knob handle of hammered silver, and are handsome when mounted in black or other dark satin edged with lace or with thick fringe. The star parasol is a novel fancy, useful as a sunshade in an open carriage. It is quite small, and forms five points like a star instead of having a straight edge. Black or white Spanish lace covers are made up over satin, and are mounted on tassel-wood sticks.

THE first visit paid by the Queen after her arrival at Balmoral was to the tomb of John Brown at Craithie, where Her Majesty remained for a very considerable time. Loyal subjects of every shade of feeling sympathised with the Queen when an old and trusted servant was lost to her, but even the most loyal and faithful of her people are beginning to wonder more or less openly at what cannot but be also considered an exaggeration of sentiment.—*Society.*

DRAMATIC entertainments have been held within the tennis courts at Taymouth Castle recently. The performers were the boys of Lady Breadalbane's Home at Kenmore, and the proceeds of the entertainment will be devoted to a fund for starting the boys in life after they leave the institution. The home was founded by her ladyship in July, 1881, and accommodates eight boys. The building was filled by an appreciative audience. The piece performed was a children's masque, entitled *The Fairy Wood*, written and arranged by Lady Breadalbane and Herbert Gardner. The masque was beautifully mounted, the dresses especially being exceedingly pretty. The musical accompaniments were played by Mr. G. H. Norrington, organist to the Earl of Breadalbane, and the stage and fittings reflected great credit upon Mr. Young and his assistants.

A NOVEL wedding took place on the 28th ult., at Belfast. The bride is the daughter of Captain Kerby, R.N., captain superintendent of the Ulster training ship *Gibraltar*, and the bridegroom, Mr. W. B. Ardill, of Lisburn. As the bride's home was on board the ship, the marriage took place from there. The *Gibraltar* was gallily decked with flags, as were also the steam launches which conveyed the party on shore. A large crowd had assembled at the docks, and every ship was gallily dressed with bunting in honour of the occasion. The ceremony took place at the parish church. The bride wore white silk, with brocade satin train, heavily trimmed with aloe lace. Her two sisters, who acted as bridesmaids, were dressed respectively in cream and red. On the conclusion of the ceremony the party again drove to the docks, where two steam launches were awaiting them. The *Gibraltar* boys gave a hearty reception to the newly-married couple, and the band played an inspiring march. The party at the *déjeuner* were Captain and Mrs. Kerby, Mrs. Ardill, Misses Ardill, the Rev. Dr. Hannay, the Rev. Mr. Beattie, &c. The bride's travelling dress was of dark blue satin, trimmed with Greek lace, and when the farewells were said, the newly-married pair once more embarked on board the steam launch *Celia*, the boys manning the rigging and cheering audaciously.

STATISTICS.

LONDON CABBEN.—There are 13,000 cab-drivers in the metropolis; and their honesty is evidenced by the statement that, during the year 1882, nearly 19,000 articles left in cabs were turned over by the drivers to the police.

FISH.—The total value of all kinds of fish exported from the United Kingdom during the last ten years is as follows: 1873, £1,296,896; 1874, £1,441,217; 1875, £1,192,481; 1876, £952,804; 1877, £1,345,603; 1878, £1,280,900; 1879, £1,417,155; 1880, £1,779,261; 1881, £1,626,085; and 1882, £1,816,702. The figures for the last year are the highest, and those for 1876 the lowest during the decade.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS' POST OFFICE.—The weekly average of letters delivered to members from the Post-office in the lobby of the House of Commons has been during the past session 22,698, and the weekly average of replies 18,000; 2,858 postal orders have been granted, and 959 money orders; 1,228 letters have been registered, and a sum of £2,843 received for stamps. More than half of the letters delivered at the House have to be re-directed to members' private addresses, involving a considerable increase of labour on the part of the clerks. It is intended, before next session to make an improvement in the accommodation for the Post-office officials.

GEMS.

WE count too often only on the rosary of our outward prosperities, and measure our gratitude too much by the shining pearls of our successes.

It is easy enough to destroy; and there are always destroyers enough. It requires skill and labour to erect a building; any scamp can burn it down.

True joy is a serene and sober motion, and they are miserably out that take laughing for rejoicing; the seat of it is within, and there is no cheerfulness like the resolutions of a brave man.

CHEERFULNESS is just as natural to the heart of a man in strong health as colour to his cheeks; and whenever there is habitual gloom there must be either bad air, unwholesome food, improperly severe labour, or erring habits.

We should remember that edification in the widest sense of the word is what we owe each other. We were sent into the world not only to enjoy ourselves, but to do our best to make those under our influence good and wise, strong and happy.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LEMON PUDDING.—Grate the rind of a lemon; mix with the yolk of two eggs one pint fine break crumb, one quart sweet milk, half cup sugar, pinch of salt. Bake twenty minutes. Beat to a froth white of the eggs, juice of the lemon and half cup sugar. Spread over top of pudding and bake five minutes.

PEAR PARASERVES.—Parboil the fruit in just enough water to cover them. When done, place the pears on a platter. Then take as many pounds of sugar as there were pears before they were boiled, and place the sugar in the water the pears were boiled in. When it comes to a boil drop in the pears, and cook until they are soft enough not to fall to pieces.

BAKED SALMON.—Boil the fish in salted water until it is tender, then put a layer of bread or cracker crumbs in the bottom of a pudding dish, then a layer of fish; season with pepper and salt; fill the dish with alternate layers of fish and crumbs; wet the bread crumbs with milk or, if this is too rich to suit your taste, use hot water. Bake for a long hour, and have the top well browned.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LONG FINGER NAILS.—According to the writer of an article on "Extraordinary Finger Nails" in the *World of Wonders*, it is the custom of the Chinese, Siamese, and Annamese to allow the nails on all their fingers, except the forefinger, to grow to a great length, and among the former they sometimes attain the incredible length of from sixteen to eighteen inches. Among the Siamese so distinctive a mark of nobility are long nails esteemed that the belles and beaux wear silver cases, either to protect their nails or else to make people believe they are there, whereas in reality they are not. As regards the little finger, the writer tells us that "Ambassadors and visitors of distinction from Asiatic States to Europe are often observed to permit the excessive growth of the nail of the little finger, and this is also a common occurrence with many of the people of India and other parts of Asia."

SUPERSTITION IN GERMANY.—Criminal prosecutions occurring in various parts of Germany throw a strange light upon the firmly-rooted belief of the peasantry in witches and witchcraft. In a case just tried at Friedberg, the wife of a railway station-master was accused of fraud and extortion in persuading a farmer and his wife that their three children were possessed by evil spirits, and under a witch's ban, and they needed exorcising very urgently. The cure she prescribed involved the frequent taking of the children's measurement, accompanied by formulated prayers and invocations of the Trinity; and twice a day they were required to pass through herds of swine; that the wicked spirits might leave their bodies and enter those of the brutes. For this cure she received two marks. The woman was convicted and sentenced to fine and imprisonment; but it would take much more than that to convince her dupes that there are no witches. All the courts in Germany would not be able to remove that belief from the minds of the country population.

FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE.—Very frequently girls decline proposals by saying, "I regard you as a friend, but I cannot become your wife." Either they do not mean it, or they do not understand—this the more probable—the significance of friendship. She who knows what friendship is would be rash to reject as husband him she had accepted as friend. It is far easier to convert a friend into a lover, as the words are properly used, than a lover into a friend. A woman of self-understanding, range, and insight would prefer a true friend to a sighing lover as her life-long partner. Lovers are abundant; friends few. How many wedded women to-day hunger for friendship from their lords; would joyfully exchange every rapture they can imagine—and their imaginings are beyond poets' dreams—for its pervading comfort, its sweet buoyancy, its penetrating sense of absolute protection! Their lords were delightful as lovers, were charming as husbands for a season—for a year, perhaps; but then a change appeared, slight at first, scarcely perceptible except to woman's watchful eye, though spreading and deepening until the present became only a mockery of the past; until tenderness broke her heart at the death-bed of gallantry. Could the wives have had friendship from the beginning they would have missed the sentimental raving, the extravagance of manner, the absurd jealousy that pertains to all wooings; but they would have had the delicate attention, the vigilant care, the genuine heart-felt sympathy that flows in steady and wholesome streams. Friendship survives many loves. Men change their loves—women change them too—and yet remain loyal to friendship of early years. Once firmly established within nor caprice can shake it; the rock of mutual understanding and forbearance is its unassailable foundation.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ROMEO.—We never insert matrimonial advertisements.

A. G. S.—The language of the Fan was given in No. 1,045, post free three halfpence in stamps.

A. W.—A great deal depends upon the position of the parties, but the husband usually has to provide it.

T. S. M.—A moss rosebud signifies "confession of love." Full-blown moss rose "superior merits."

ELIZA R.—The husband certainly is not liable. The money can be recovered from the wife's separate estate.

LILY.—A pretty girl of marriageable age. She should not lack admirers.

A. C. E.—It can be obtained from any good drapers at about eighteenpence a yard. 2. Good writing, but a little straggling.

C. T.—We cannot give any opinion as to the stability of a company. A stockbroker could tell you the value of the shares.

A. P. S.—The customary honour of a bow should be given at the commencement and conclusion of each dance.

C. F. N.—The first unsuccessful attempt was made in 1857, but the first successful Atlantic cable was completed in August, 1858.

B. W. X.—A lady will usually have her escort to any place of amusement, and of course the one that has acted as her escort there will escort her home.

M. G. R.—When a lady is standing in a quadrille, though not engaged in dancing, a gentleman not acquainted with her partner should not converse with her.

B. O. A.—The engagement-ring is worn on the third finger of the right hand, and if the engagement-ring is a plain gold band, it may also do duty as a wedding-ring.

N. H. J.—To invite a young lady to accompany you to a ball or party the invitation will be given in much the same form as asking her for her company to any other place of amusement.

GERTRUDE F.—Try to keep your husband at home, and when he goes out in the evening ask him to take you with him. Make yourself pleasant and companionable.

VANELLA.—We think that your relative size is slightly out of proportion, but that is not important. Some very slight ladies have made excellent wives to men of as great size as your admirer.

D. D.—Adhesive fly-paper is made by boiling linseed oil to which a little resin has been added, until a viscid mass is formed, which is spread evenly on the paper selected for the purpose.

G. N. O.—Glycerine mixed with a little fresh lemon juice will soften and whiten the skin. There is nothing better for chapped hands in winter or for sun-tan in summer.

ALICE.—1. Powdered charcoal is disinfectant and absorbent. It corrects acidity of the stomach, and is recommended for the breath. It has no blood purifying properties. 2. No.

CORIEA.—In conducting a lady to the dining-room, offer her your arm, and place her on the side next the wall. When the dining-room is on the same floor as the drawing-room, custom sanctions the offer of the left arm.

DE. ANNE.—There are a few ladies who decline to provide over their coffee-urns for large breakfast parties, but most hostesses enjoy the domestic hospitality which this attention to her friends suggests.

J. L.—In writing to a perfect stranger on business of any kind you should begin your letter with "Sir," or "Madam," and sign yourself "Yours faithfully," or "Yours obediently."

FREDA.—If a lady pays a gentleman a compliment, incidentally or special, he should say, "You flatter me," or "You do me great honour." Of course he will show his appreciation of the lady's good opinion by some words of thanks.

B. F. U.—Brévipennate means short-winged; having wings that are half-budded, and therefore short—applied to a division of birds which cannot fly, owing to their size and short wings, including the ostrich, cassowary, swan, dodo, &c.

G. D.—1. Offer the whole hand. It is an insult, and indicates snobbery, to present two fingers when shaking hands. 2. It is always the lady's privilege to extend the hand first. 3. In her own house a lady should give her hand to every guest.

L. L. D.—The gentleman should always precede the lady in ascending a flight of stairs. The lady will take the right-hand side of the gentleman when ascending a flight of stairs together, but he should be allowed to be a step in advance of the lady.

ANNETTE.—To pickle cucumbers—Get very small cucumbers, wipe them clean, and lay them in stone jars. Allow one quart of coarse salt to a peck of water; boil the salt and water till the salt is dissolved; turn it boiling hot on the cucumbers; cover them tight and let them stand twenty-four hours, then turn them into a

bucket to drain. Boil as much of the best cider vinegar as will cover the cucumbers; wash out the jars and put the cucumbers into them; pour the vinegar on boiling hot; cover them with cabbage leaves, and cover the jars themselves tight. In forty-eight hours the pickles will be fit for use.

STABLEMENT BROS.—Be governed by your mother's opinion of the young men. Your parents are better able to judge of them than we are. You are too young to trust your own impulses. Do not be in any haste to engage yourself to marry either.

CHIEF.—A solvent man has the right to settle the whole or part of his estate upon his wife, and may make afterwards just as faithful a director of a bank. If insolvent, and the transfer is made in fraud of creditors, it will not hold good in law.

OTTENBERG.—1. The only remedy is to indulge in the practice as little as possible. Sometimes if the motion is reversed the giddiness will be got over. 2. The hair sent is fawn colour. 3. We cannot give rules for mesmerizing. 4. Writing good, but a little careless.

LITTLE ONE.—1. Clarendon means "bright." Beside "the oath of the Lord," it's a causing life. 2. The 8rd of December, 1893, fell on Wednesday, and the 9th of April, 1894, on Saturday. 3. Writing neat, but rather too small to be fashionable.

LOVE'S COMING.

She had looked for his coming as warriors come,
With the clash of arms and the bugle's call;
But he came instead with a steady tread,
Which she did not hear at all.

She had thought how his armour would blaze in the sun,
As he rode like a prince to claim his bride;
In the sweet dim light of the falling night
She found him at her side.

She had dreamed how the gaze of his strange hold
Would wake her heart to a sudden glow;
She found in his face the familiar grace
Of a friend she used to know.

She dreamed how his coming would stir her soul,
As the ocean is stirred by the wild storm's strife;
He brought her the balm of a heavenly calm,
And a peace which crowned her life.

E. W.

D. M. G.—To invite a lady to dance with you the words "Will you honour me with your hand for a quadrille?" or "Shall I have the honour of dancing this set with you?" are more used now than "Shall I have the pleasure?" or "Will you give me the pleasure of dancing with you?"

M. B. S.—At a wedding the groom and best men wear dark frock coats and vests, with lighter trousers. Blue coats and vests, with light trousers, and sometimes white vests are fashionable. Gloves and neck-ties are light, but not white. His right arm is offered to the bride when leaving the church.

L. B.—The gentleman should be introduced to the lady: "Miss D., allow me to present or introduce to you Mr. G.—Mr. G., Miss D.," but unless you are very intimately acquainted with both the lady and gentleman you should not introduce the gentleman without first ascertaining if it will be agreeable to the lady.

WILLIE R.—Be very discreet, or you will involve the young lady in trouble. You are both too young to marry. You should go to her father and ask his advice. It would be well to wait for two years before thinking of marriage, and in the meantime avoid offending the employers of the young lady. Let her keep her place.

R. B.—If a gentleman meets a lady at a friend's house, and she is unaccompanied by any escort, he may with propriety ask to be allowed the pleasure of accompanying her home. All must of course depend upon the intimacy of their acquaintance or friendship, as no lady can with propriety allow a stranger to act as her escort, unless she is accompanied with her mother, sister, or a chaperone.

LEEA.—To remove pitting and old pock-marks, simple oil or pomade, medicated with croton oil, and of a strength just sufficient to produce a slight pustular eruption, is probably the safest and most convenient of all the preparations that are used for that purpose. It should be applied at intervals extending over several weeks, as feelings, experience, and convenience of the party concerned may indicate.

D. B. W.—The *Royal George* was a British man-of-war, of 105 guns, the sudden sinking of which in Portsmouth Harbour, with all on board, August 20, 1783, created a great stir throughout the country, and was commemorated by Cowper in the beautiful elegy of which you write. She was the principal vessel of Lord Howe's fleet, and while undergoing repairs of her keel was too much heeled over, so that the water rushing through the port-holes of the depressed side speedily filled her, and she sank with all on board, including the famous Admiral Kempenfeldt, the officers, crew, and about 800 women and children who happened to be on board at the time—about 1,100 persons all told. Only 200 of these were saved, but a small vessel, anchored near by was drawn into the whirlpool, saved by the *Royal George's* descent and also swallowed up, and several

other vessels were placed in great danger. Several schemes were afterward projected for raising the vessel, but without success, until 1839, when the mass was blown to pieces with large cans of gunpowder. By this means a large quantity of the valuables belonging in the ship were brought up, and the brass guns recovered sufficed to pay for the expense attendant upon the operation.

C. J. S.—A young lady who is very well known in society should not make herself too common; she should not appear in too many charades, private theatricals, tableaux, &c. She should think of the "violet by the mossy stone." She must also at a watering-place remember that every act of hers is being criticised by a set of lookers-on who are not all friendly, and she must, ere she allows herself to be too much of a belle, remember to silence envious tongues.

ARIADNE.—When a gentleman is an invited guest at a friend's house for only a night it is not a rule, neither is it necessary, that the servant or servants should be presented with money by the guest, but if the guest remains for any length of time, it is only courtesy on the part of the guest that the servants should receive something for the extra work his stay has necessarily occasioned them. This is not obligatory, but at the option of the visitor.

B. W. F.—1. Boots and shoes may be made waterproof by using a composition made in the following manner: Take 3 ounces of spermaceti, and melt it in an earthen vessel over a slow fire; add to this 6 drachms of India-rubber, cut into thin slices, which will be dissolved in a short time. Then add to this mixture 8 ounces of tallow, 2 ounces of lard, and 4 ounces of amber varnish. Mix thoroughly, and it will be ready for immediate use. Put two or three coats on the boots or shoes with a common blacking-brush, and a fine polish will result.

PALIA.—1. Numberless remedies have been given for freckles. The following is recommended as simple and efficacious:—Dissolve in half an ounce of lemon juice, one ounce of Venice soap, and add a quarter of an ounce each of oil of bitter almonds and deliquated oil of tartar. Let the mixture stand in the sun till it acquires the consistency of ointment. When in this state add three drops of the oil of rhodium and keep for use. Apply in the following manner: Wash the face and arms at night with elderflower water, and then anoint with the ointment. In the morning wash it off with warm water. 2. Hair a pretty shade of bright brown, fine in texture, and well kept.

M. V. J.—The system which Mr. Banting pursued to reduce his weight from 398 pounds to 160 was this: For breakfast, four ounces of beef, mutton, or any kind of broiled fish or cold meat, excepting pork, salmon, eels, and herring; a large cup of tea, without milk or sugar, a little biscuit or an ounce of dry toast. For dinner, five or six ounces of any fish or meat (except those prohibited), any vegetables (except potatoes, parsnips, and beets), one ounce of dry toast, ripe and cooked fruits, any kind of poultry and game. For tea, two or three ounces of fruit, dry toast, and a cup of tea without milk or sugar. And for supper, three or four ounces of meat or fish, with a glass of cold claret or Madeira. Food which contains sugar and starch in large proportions rapidly creates fat, and must be avoided by those who have a horror of corpulency.

F. U. S.—To make a common looking-glass on tin-foil sily disposed on a flat table, mercury is to be poured, and gently rubbed with a hard's foot. It can unite itself with the tin, which then becomes very "splendid," or, as the workmen say, is "quikened." A plate of glass is then cautiously to be slid upon the tin leaf, in such a manner as to sweep off the redundant mercury which is not incorporated with the tin. Leaden weights are then to be placed on the glass, and in a little time the quicksilver tin-foil adheres so firmly to the glass that the weights may be removed without any danger of the falling off. About two ounces of mercury are sufficient for covering three square feet of glass. The success of the operation depends much on the cleanliness of the glass, and the least dust or dirt on its surface will prevent the adhesion of the amalgam or alloy.

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ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF "THE LONDON READER," 334, Strand, W.C.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. B. SERRIS, and Printed by WOODFALL and KNIGHT, Milford Lane, Strand.

